

# *Introduction to Marxism*

*Bastiaan Wielenga*



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## **ABOUT THIS BOOK**

Since we consider an "Introduction to Marxism" essential for social activists, we had originally included a booklet on this theme in our CSA series. In spite of its length, we have decided to publish this balanced and more detailed book of Bastiaan Wielenga, for it can help social activists to understand better the various trends within marxism. The author indeed presents the ideas of Marx, Engels, and their followers from within the marxist perspective and describes the ongoing marxist debate on many issues. Though perhaps somewhat difficult for some, the reading of this book will certainly be rewarding. Yet, we still see the need for a shorter and simpler introduction and we will try to answer it later on ... We will inform our readers when we succeed to do it!

*The Publishers*







# ***Introduction to Marxism***

*Bastiaan Wielenga*

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Bangalore



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## FOREWORD

There is no end to writing an "Introduction To Marxism". Marxist theory has served the struggle against capitalism and for socialism since more than one century. In the course of time and as marxist-inspired movements have spread over the globe it has undergone many changes. Different branches developed, often claiming to be the only true heirs. Even a superficial survey of this branching out would run into hundreds of pages. The literature is immense. The Collected Works of Marx, Engels and Lenin alone count more than hundred solid volumes. To understand them a lot of other material has to be studied. Meanwhile great revolutions and new historical developments have taken place, new material from ancient history comes to light throwing up new insights and new questions, new sciences require new theoretical approaches, new social movements open new perspectives in the struggle against capitalism.

It is understandable that militant activists demand a handy summary of marxist truth. They have no time to wade through so much of literature and no ambition to indulge in endless debates about theoretical questions. But there is no commonly accepted "marxism" which is beyond inner-marxist dispute. There are competing interpretations of marxism. The times are passed that the party ideologues in Moscow could decree—like a sort of Vatican—what the only true version is. So everybody is confronted with the necessity to make up his or her mind on theoretical questions. Who is right: the Moscow-communists, the Peking-communists (the previous ones or the present ones), the Yugoslavs, the Italians, the Cubans, still others? Or are all maybe partly right to a greater or lesser extent? How to find one's way through all the conflicting claims and confrontations? That is not only a question of party programmes and political strategies. There are basic differences in the approach to marxist theory itself. In order to choose one's own orientation one has to get acquainted with the theoretical questions involved. A handy summary would serve only one faction. What is needed, however, is access to the material and the discussions on the basis of which we can form our own opinion. That is what this book "Introduction To Marxism" tries to provide, though unavoidably in a limited, selective way.



The only way to cross the dogmatic barriers between the various segments of the Left is to go back to Marx. Of course, he also is not beyond dispute. There are conflicting interpretations which may be coloured by the present divisions. And even if there is agreement about a common interpretation there may be disagreement about its validity one century later. Yet, Marx belongs to all: Marxists, Leninists, Marxist-Leninists, Trotskyites, Maoists, New Left, Titoists, Castroists, etc. Some sectarian minded comrades see this as a danger and therefore try to prevent their followers to study Marx himself. It would confuse them they say. This reminds of medieval priests who forbade the people to read the Bible because it would undermine their monopoly of the truth.

From previous experiences I expect that some friends will eagerly search for positions taken in this book which enable them to label my position. I cannot stop them as they won't have peace of mind without that. But may be I can facilitate their search with two suggestions. They will find frequently critical remarks in the direction of Stalin and Stalinism. They are wrong if they conclude that I must be a Trotskyite. Nowadays there are not many branches of marxist thought in the world which don't criticise Stalin. I agree with the late K. Damodaran that Trotsky was a Marxist who should be seriously studied and critically evaluated—instead of making him the label for imperialist plots or all possible heresies. I regret that I could not discuss his contribution, as I could not present that of Rosa Luxemburg and other important marxists. In any case the label "Trotskyite" does not fit as readers of ch. V with its references to the peasantry and the national question will see.

To those who insist on putting a label I suggest to put that of "Leftist Unity" as pursued by The Marxist Review. I hurry to declare that The Marxist Review is not responsible for the views expressed here, some of which may not at all be agreeable to it. The point is that the best way towards "Left Unity" is a principled discussion on theoretical issues in connection with continuing analysis of the changing situation.

So I have tried within the limits of time and resources available to select and present basic themes of marxist theory as I understand them for study and discussion by the readers. The references especially to the works of Marx should make it possible to enter into a first-hand reading so as to form an independent opinion. The references to other literature—a rather limited selection in fact—are not meant to impress the readers with all sorts of authorities, but only to convey an idea of the wide scope of the marxist debate and to invite them to make their



own explorations and discoveries.

Nobody should get frightened or discouraged by the fact that marxist theory is such a vast field. Though I have written this book I am unable to grasp some of the discussions between specialized marxist scholars, for example in the area of political economy or of philosophy of science. For some readers my presentation will be too simplistic, for others some portions will be on the difficult side. But hopefully they will find other portions more easily accessible. From there they may begin to dig more deeply, to study relevant chapters of Marx and to discover rather soon that the other portions also become more understandable. In any case, this book is only an introduction. The real thing starts when readers take, let us say, "Capital"—if possible in a small group—and start studying some of its chapters, for example, on the Working-Day. Along with that it would be good to get acquainted with the historical context by reading biographies like that of Nikolaevskij on Marx and studies on historical events as the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, etc.

This book cannot be directly used as it is for "training" sessions. It seems to me that another methodology has to be followed to develop an understanding of marxist theory among those who have less formal education. Workers with little schooling are perfectly able to understand the core of the marxist theories, but as they are not used to handle abstract concepts this has to be presented much more through images, narratives and the like. However, in order to be able to do such a translation, one needs a good grasp of marxist theory on a more general level. This book moves on that intermediate level between specialised discussion and local transposition with the help of blackboard, images, songs and narratives.

The first two chapters have been presented in some discussion groups which gave feed-back with regard to clarity of presentation, etc. The next two chapters were also discussed to some extent though not sufficiently. The last two chapters were written under greater pressure of time and only with very limited feed-back from a larger group.

Content-wise I have benefitted very much from the continuous intensive dialogue with Gabriele Dietrich on a wide range of questions, leading to clarification and often revision of my first attempts to present certain themes and to surprising perspectives. If I could I would express my feelings towards her rather in poem...

The other person to whom I am deeply grateful is Ajit Roy who read



most of the manuscript—except the last one and a half chapter—at one stage or the other. I did not follow up on all his comments, and he is not responsible for the final result.

Ajit Roy combines a rather orthodox frame of reference with a flexible, dialectical, independent way of analysing. Gabriele Dietrich combines a rather unorthodox, sometimes breathtaking frame of reference—including the Bible, Marx, feminism, yoga and so on—with a consistent orthopraxis which leaves no doubt about her political choices. I would like to dedicate this book to both of them.

It is the first time that I did not type my own manuscripts. I am very grateful to Tanya Brewart and Adele Bentick for the excellent work they did in turning my scribbled papers full of corrections into a neatly typewritten product.

References to “Capital” (3 vol.), and to the “Selected Works” (3 vol.) and “Collected Works” of Marx/Engels are taken from the editions of Progress Publishers, Moscow, unless mentioned otherwise. These are easily available at cheap rates and should be at hand for references and further study.

— *Bastiaan Wielenga*



## CHAPTER I

# Materialist Conception of History

## 1. Materialism

Marx's main concern is the analysis of society and history. The "materialist conception of history" as Marx called it, or "historical materialism" as later marxists put it, is the theory which provides the framework and tools for the critical study of society and history. We need an understanding of the basic tenets of this theory before we can move to a more detailed discussion of the various aspects of Marx's analysis of society.

What does Marx mean by materialism when he speaks of his materialist conception of history? First of all this is directed against all idealist interpretation of history. Hegel, the German philosopher who had dominated the intellectual scene in the time of Marx's youth, had developed a grand philosophy of history in which the Absolute Spirit was seen as the moving force of history, giving it coherence, meaning and perspective. Marx rejected this approach as idealistic speculation. He proposed to start from the material basis of life and to interpret history from that angle.

But what did he mean by material basis? Here we find Marx differing not only from the idealists who start from an immaterial spirit but also from the traditional materialists who start from matter. The main concern of materialist thinkers, such as the French materialists of the 18th century, had been to explain everything in man and society as the result of physical, material processes. They would characterise the human being as a self-moving machine and they would focus on the material, physical causes of all happenings. Inspired by the natural sciences they would see human beings in their historical actions as determined by an uninterrupted chain of material processes which were understood in a mechanical way. This led to a deterministic view of history which tended to neglect the active role of human beings in shaping history.



## *Introduction to Marxism*

To this mechanical determinism Marx objected in his materialist conception of history. For him the material basis of history was not simply nature or matter, but the inter-action of human being and nature. Human history develops on the basis of our active interaction with nature, our metabolism with nature as Marx often calls it. History, change and development of society, arise from the human practice of production and reproduction. Marx proposes to start the analysis of history and society from *human practice*, from what human beings are doing everywhere and always, namely producing and reproducing.

What matters first of all in history is how human beings manage to survive, how they produce their means of subsistence and how they reproduce life. That is the material basis for all other human activity, including the production of culture and ideas. The way in which this interaction of human beings and nature develops and changes determines the other aspects of human practice, shapes the whole mode of life, including the interaction with other individuals. The historical materialist approach focusses on this “practical process of development of men”.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that this materialism which starts from the “matter” of human practice differs from the mechanical materialism which reduces everything to the “matter” of nature. The popular presentation of the philosophy of marxism as consisting of dialectical and historical materialism, as we will see later, tends to obscure the crucial point that Marx starts from the “matter” of human productive activity. What matters to him most in his framework of analysis is the activity of living individuals in material production. Doing this Marx stresses the active role of the human subject while traditional materialism sees it as object of the determining processes of nature. A few quotations from Marx may document this crucial difference in approach.

In his “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845) Marx criticizes the “materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing” because it forgets the other side “that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating”.<sup>2</sup>

*“The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism — that of Feuerbach included — is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the **object** or of **contemplation**, but not as **human sensuous activity, practice**, not subjectively”.*<sup>3</sup>

This applies not only to things which are the result of human activity, such as a table or any other product. It applies also to the reality of



nature which changes under the impact of human practice. Jakubowski gives the example of the sea or the ocean. What was a barrier between continents, a "natural" separation, became a connection, a means of communication, once the art of shipping had been developed.

In "Capital" Marx criticises what he called the "abstract materialism of natural science", because it "excludes history and its process". It does not take into consideration that "human history differs from natural history in this, that we have made the former but not the latter". Of course, Marx had high respect for the natural sciences, but he made the point that human history cannot be studied in the same way as nature. Leaving out the active role of the human subject leads, as Marx says in the same place, to "abstract and ideological (!) conceptions". As opposed to this Marx sees his materialistic method as a scientific and not an ideological method, i.e. as a method which accords with the reality of history and which does not distort it.

From a scientific point of view it makes sense to take material production as the starting point for a theoretical explanation of forms and changes in society and history. It is the easiest way to find some regular patterns in that bewildering complex reality of society and human history. Whatever the endless differences between individuals nobody can escape from the necessity to satisfy his basic needs, and in the way of doing this, in production and distribution, certain regular patterns develop. These patterns of production, of ownership, of division of labour, of distribution etc., can be generalised in a scientific way much more easily than other aspects of human behaviour.

## 2. History

Different approaches can be distinguished in Marx's understanding of history.

a) The young Marx with his philosophical interest speaks of history as the *history of human emancipation*. In history human kind realises itself. This understanding presupposes that history can be viewed as a totality with an inner purpose. Theologians have interpreted this view as a secular version of the history of salvation. Instead of God bringing redemption history would finally redeem itself. But Marx himself soon criticized the assumption that history acts as a sort of subject.

*"History does nothing; it does not possess immense riches, it does not fight battles. It is men, real, living men, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles. It is not 'history' which uses men as*



*a means of achieving—as if it were an individual person—its own ends. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends”.*<sup>5</sup>

Thus Marx rejects any hidden teleology, any hidden goal of history apart from the goals human beings themselves set. This is an important corrective for all those theories of progress and revolution which turn “history”, “revolution”, etc., into a sort of secular gods who apart from human activity somehow will take care of the future, in spite of all the mistakes we may make. Often such entities turn into ‘molochs’, gods who demand and justify human sacrifices brought in blind faith that this will certainly lead to the goal.

b) Marx develops his understanding of *history as “human practice”* in “German Ideology” (1845-46). The question he asks is no longer “What is the meaning of history” but “how does it happen”. History is seen as the result of the actions of individuals and groups towards the satisfaction of their needs. The results may be very different from what people intended by their actions, but nevertheless they are the result of nothing else than human action. History in this conception is not the realisation of some in-built programme, but rather an open process. In the course of history human beings develop their productive forces and create particular forms of society. The coherence of history, its continuity and inner connection arises from the simple fact that each generation inherits the product of the preceding generations.

*“History is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which uses the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity. This can be speculatively distorted so that later history is made the goal of earlier history...”*<sup>6</sup>

c) The same Marx who so much emphasised human practice as the starting point for all understanding of history speaks in a Preface to his major work “Capital” of “the natural laws of capitalist production” which are “working with iron necessity toward inevitable results”.<sup>7</sup> This sounds as if people are completely determined by *iron laws* from which there is no escape. Marxism after Marx has often taken such a deterministic view. Not human practice but the “laws of motion of capital” were seen as the heart of the matter. Sometimes people seemed to be almost absent from the doctrines of marxism. But that makes nonsense of marxism as a revolutionary theory in which human practice is the heart of the matter.



Nevertheless, Marx does speak of "laws" and of "iron necessity". Here we have to be clear about the *limited validity of the laws* Marx is referring to. The limitation is threefold: 1) the limit of scientific models; 2) the limit of the historical context; 3) the limit of economic theory.

1) The laws of capitalist production of which Marx speaks are "iron" only in theory, in the theoretical model, as it is the case in other sciences also. In social reality other factors make their impact, so that these economic laws in historical practice only operate as "tendencies". For example, Marx formulates in "Capital" a law regarding the general rate of surplus value. Commenting on the validity of this law he writes:

*"Such a general rate of surplus value—viewed as a tendency, like all other economic laws—has been assumed by us for the sake of theoretical simplification... In theory it is assumed that the laws of capitalist production operate in their pure form. In reality there exists only approximation; but, this approximation is the greater, the more developed the capitalist mode of production and the less it is adulterated and amalgamated with survivals of former economic conditions".<sup>8</sup>*

*"We have thus seen in a general way that the same influences which produce a tendency in the general rate of profit to fall, also call forth counter-effects, which hamper, retard, and partly paralyse this fall. The latter do not do away with the law, but impair its effect... Thus, the law acts only as a tendency".<sup>9</sup>*

The function of these laws or concepts is not to outline a basic philosophy of history, but to give a theoretical explanation of certain phenomena which otherwise appear to be chaotic and without clue.

2) When Marx speaks of "the natural laws of capitalist production" he limits their validity to those societies which definitely have taken the path of capitalism. He does not speak of some eternal laws which rule the whole of history with iron necessity, but of laws which are valid only in a limited realm under certain conditions. As he puts it in the next page of his Preface to "Capital", "it is the ultimate aim of this work, to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society".

Marx confines the validity of his theories in "Capital" to the economic structure of capitalism in Western Europe. He rejects a more universal interpretation of "Capital" by the Russian writer Mikhailovsky who is transforming

*"my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe*



*into an historico-philosophic theory of the general path of development prescribed by fate to all nations, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves*".<sup>10</sup>

The laws of capital would apply to Russia only when capitalism would have taken roots in that country, something which Marx did not consider an inevitable necessity.

3) When Marx speaks of "the natural laws of capitalist production" he limits himself to the "economic law of motion of modern society". He does not claim to formulate in "Capital" laws which would govern capitalist society as a whole, including its social, political and cultural processes. His book carries the title "Capital" not "Capitalism" or "Capitalist Society". It is only about the "Political Economy" of capitalism as the subtitle says.

Since "Capital" was Marx's major work and historical materialism his major theory, there has been a tendency to identify both, taking "Capital" as the best example of what historical materialism is all about. But historical materialism has a much wider scope as E.P. Thompson<sup>11</sup> and others have shown. Historical materialism aims at understanding the whole of society—economy, law, politics, morality, etc.,—while it assumes that economic production forms the key to it. The young Marx had the ambition to study the various parts and finally "to show the connection of the whole and the relationship of the parts to each other",<sup>12</sup> but he got so deeply involved in the study of one part, of political economy, that Engels concluded at the end of his life that the theory of historical materialism still had to be worked out. He finds "many allusions" to it in "Capital" and a more detailed account could be found in his writings "Anti-Duehring" and "Ludwig Feuerbach",<sup>13</sup> but the main job had still to be done, as he writes in the same year:

*"All history must be studied afresh, the conditions of existence of the different formations of society must be examined in detail before the attempt is made to deduce from them the political, civil-law, aesthetic, philosophic, religious, etc. views corresponding to them. Up to now very little has been done in this respect"*.<sup>14</sup>

Marx has given such historical materialist analysis mainly with reference to politics and for example bureaucracy in his works "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", and Engels has done studies with reference to family and state in his book "The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State". A fine contemporary example of a comprehensive historical analysis, taking into



consideration all the aspects of society in the framework of an analysis of its economic structure are the studies of E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Age of Revolution", and "The Age of Capital".<sup>15</sup>

In other words, if we want to understand Indian society in a historical materialist way, it is not enough to study and apply the concepts and theories of "Capital". That is certainly necessary—though not sufficient, because the economic conditions are also different—for the analysis of the economic structure, and thus for the study of the whole of Indian society. But it does not make superfluous the careful study of all other aspects, of the patterns of family and caste, of legal and political structures, of the bureaucracy, of customs and morality, of art and religion. A historical materialist analysis would provide an understanding of this as a whole and of the interaction of the various parts on the basis of the economic structure.

Finally, the whole theoretical work of Marx, both his historical materialism and his grappling with Political Economy and with the laws of capital are not meant to propagate a philosophy of determinism. On the contrary, he tries to understand patterns, relationships, connections, tendencies, laws, in order to provide a guide for human action. Because history is made by human beings, it makes sense to make sense of history, to find out the logic of its processes. And this will help people today to decide, to choose their course of action in the struggles of today.

The better people understand the laws of economic life and the historical character of these "laws", the better they understand the relationship with other aspects of society, the more effectively they can act. Of course, people are limited in their historical options according to Marx. They cannot change history at will. But neither are they doomed to remain passive. They can even play a revolutionary role when the conditions have ripened. Human interference can shorten and lessen the birthpangs of a new society.<sup>16</sup> And lack of human interference or misguided action can result in abortion, in failure, so that the new society does not come into being. Class struggle can end "either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes".<sup>17</sup> Marxist theory instead of being deterministic—like most of academic sociology—is revolutionary. It assumes that human beings through a proper theoretical understanding will be able to bring social life under their own control instead of being ruled by the blind forces of economy. It was for that practical, revolutionary purpose of theory that Marx sacrificed health, happiness and family, as he wrote to a friend.



*"If one chose to be an ox, one could of course turn one's back on the suffering of mankind and look after one's own skin. But I should have really regarded myself as **impractical** if I had pegged out without completely finishing my book (Capital), at least in manuscript."*<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Determination

Historical materialism asserts that society as a whole is determined by its economic structure. This needs further detailed discussion. But prior to that the concept of determination has to be clarified. A lot of discussion is taking place on this question in present-day marxist thinking. For a long time historical materialism has been taken as a form of economic determinism. It was assumed that everything in society, politics, or morality, family life or religion, followed by iron necessity from objective economic conditions. In that understanding all problems could be reduced to or deduced from the mode of production. The Althusser school has introduced the concept of "over-determination" in order to avoid such reductionism and make room for determination by various factors at the same time. But with the absence of any subject of history in their theory they still end up with a determinism which cannot explain why people should try to make revolution and to change society.<sup>19</sup>

The most helpful definition of determination I find in a booklet of Raymond Williams, "Marxism and literature".<sup>20</sup> The author recalls the various meanings of the word "determine". Its root means "setting bounds" or "setting limits". One can speak of determining an action in the sense of setting an end to it. Often it is outside forces which set the end. A policeman may tell children to stop their games and get away. For the children that is not only the end of their game but also the experience of limits set by an outside power which they cannot overcome. "Determinism" has very much to do with the experience of uncontrollable outside forces, be it nature or fate or gods, determining one's life, setting an end to one's dreams and hopes and actions. With the development of the natural sciences the causes were studied which determined the outcome of natural processes, and the laws were formulated which determined nature. These iron laws were setting definite limits, and made prediction possible.

It was this scientific understanding of causal determination of the limits set by definite causes, operating with the force of natural laws, which has thoroughly influenced the understanding of determination in historical materialism. It came to mean that people are completely determined by economic laws beyond their control. Actually that is



what we often experience and what makes determinism in this sense a convincing explanation of what is happening. But such fatalism cannot be the meaning of a revolutionary theory like marxism. Marx and Engels affirmed again and again that "we make our history ourselves".<sup>21</sup> We are not made by laws. We are not only the products of circumstances, we are also the producers of circumstances. We are agents, subjects of history. But this does not mean that we can make history just as we like, according to beautiful blueprints or daring dreams. While making history we act "under very definite assumptions and conditions". We are "determined" in the sense that there are limits to what we can achieve here and now.

These limits are the conditions into which we are born. We don't start from scratch. There are historical limits, conditions "independent" of our will, created by generations before us, which we have inherited. That does not mean that these conditions operate like absolute causes according to uncontrollable laws. The future also depends on our "determination", on the pressures which people exert, what impact these conditions make and whether they are changing. That refers to a further meaning of "determine" which has to be included. We can speak of people who are determined to do something. People may get determined to fight exploitation, no longer to accept the limits set by the prevailing mode of production, to fight for a new society. Whatever moves people to act, their determination is as much part of the reality of society in the process of change as the determination by outside conditions which after all are also created by human beings. That is why Marx can write:

*"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles".*<sup>22</sup>

The inherited class structure of a society sets the limits, the conditions under which people move to make their history. People are determined by feudal or capitalist conditions. But they don't need to remain passive. They are not powerless individuals who cannot be but overwhelmed by the objective conditions, let us say by the laws of the market. They may decide to get involved in the class struggle in order to change the conditions.<sup>23</sup>

Here we touch upon the question of *consciousness*, of class consciousness as well as of other forms of consciousness. It is a basic assumption of Marx that consciousness is determined by being. "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being" as the idealists assume. It is the other way around, it is "their social being that determines their consciousness"<sup>24</sup> Their social being either sets the



limits of what they are able to perceive or it arouses their protest against their actual condition. In his studies of political economy Marx emphasises the first aspect, as in the text from which this statement is taken (Preface to Critique of Political Economy). In his political writings he presupposes and stresses the second aspect.

The expression “social being” has often been taken in the narrow sense of “economic being” or “economic base”, while “consciousness” has been equated with superstructure. It is true that Marx uses the base-superstructure image in the same text. It is also true that the focus of this summary of the historical materialist approach is very much on the economic basis. But further reflection will show that the concept of social being must have a much wider meaning and that consciousness cannot be identical with superstructure.<sup>25</sup>

The function of the base-superstructure image will be discussed in the next section. It explains the connection of various structures: the economic structure as foundation, the other structures as superstructure. The *relationship of social being and consciousness* is different. On the one hand, consciousness is not only there in the superstructure, in politics, morality and religion. It is also there and very much so in the very process of economic, material production. Human beings distinguish themselves from animals, as Marx pointed out, exactly by the role of consciousness in production, by the fact that they imagine, that they conceptualise what they are going to produce before they start producing. On the other hand, the “social being” which conditions people is not only a matter of economic production, but also of social patterns, of family and caste, of political institutions, of bureaucracy and police, and of cultural and religious conditions, of customs and festivals, of schools and mass media. All this and much more belongs to the social reality which determines the consciousness of people.

Let us take an example. Rich landlords attack a village of landless labourers, burn their huts, rape their women and murder a number of people who fail to escape. How do we explain such events in a marxist analysis? First of all we will try to find the economic reason behind the attack. The labourers may have demanded higher wages. That points at the class character of the violence of the landlords. They have reacted as employers who refuse to pay higher wages and who want to teach a frightening lesson to those who intend to raise such demands. Sometimes we may not even find such direct economic reasons. In any case the landlords “are” not only employers. Their relationship to



the labourers is not only an economic relationship. They “are” also caste Hindus who feel challenged by the lack of traditional respect on the side of the labourers who are not only workers but also untouchables. And the landlords “are” also males who prove their superior power by raping the women of the labourers. And they are maybe also affiliated with a political party whose candidate may have been defeated in the last election because the labourers did no longer vote for the candidate of the landlords. All this together makes up the “social being” of the landlords. All this together shapes their “consciousness” which leads to massacre. In their turn the labourers who survived may draw various conclusions from the bitter experiences of their social reality. They may either think that it is impossible to overcome the limits set by it, they may accept some fatalistic explanation and resign, or they may get determined to rally more forces to challenge the powers that determine their life.

Of course, the thrust of historical materialism is to understand the various aspects of social reality and thus of consciousness in connection with the economic base which structures the whole of society. But it is important to remember that it is not only class, not only the position in the economic structure which determines the consciousness of people, which makes up their “conscious being”, their self-understanding, their awareness of their place in society. It is also and often more so family, caste, nationality, sex, age group, custom, religion, political affiliation which determines their consciousness. That is exactly why it is so difficult to promote “class consciousness”. If economic being alone would determine consciousness all people should automatically have something like a class consciousness. This is not the case as all those know who are involved in people’s organisations.

#### **4. Base and Superstructure**

Unfortunately the distinction of base and superstructure has become a much more important tool of marxist analysis than the connection of social being and consciousness. The use which Marx made of this image does not justify the place of pride it got in later marxism. Neither does it permit to look at society in a dualistic way, as it often happens, with the realm of economics down here and the realm of politics, ideology and the rest up there. Marx used the analogy for the opposite purpose, namely to make sure that nobody would separate politics or ideology and the rest from economics. But before we discuss this relationship more closely, it may be useful to introduce both aspects and some of the concepts used in connection



with it in some detail.

### a. *Economic Structure*

Marx takes material production as the basis for his analysis of different forms of society. His historical materialist approach assumes that the economic structure of a society provides the key to understanding that society as a whole. For the analysis of the economic structure he developed certain tools, concepts which identify its main elements. The usual textbooks for college courses in economics speak mainly of prices, supply and demand, etc. Marx does not start from there, i.e. from the distribution of goods. He starts from what is more fundamental, i.e. from production.

First Marx analyses the labour-process as it is common to all forms of society. The human action which aims at the production of use values to satisfy human needs is "the everlasting Nature-imposed condition of human existence".<sup>26</sup>

*"The elementary factors of the labour-process are 1, the personal activity of man, i.e. work itself, 2, the subject of that work, and 3, its instruments."*<sup>27</sup>

In his analysis of labour as interaction with Nature Marx, the historical materialist, gives the first place to human initiative and activity.

*"Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature"*.<sup>28</sup>

Nature, secondly, provides the "subjects of labour" either in the form of natural resources in the case of extractive industries or in the form of "raw materials" which have been processed already by human labour. Even such things as seeds, animals and plants which we may consider as products of nature, "are in their present form not only products of, say last year's labour, but the result of a gradual transformation, continued through many generations, under man's superintendence, and by means of his labour".<sup>29</sup>

The earth is not only the "universal subject of human labour", the "original larder", but also the "original tool house" which provides the material for the third elementary factor of the labour process, the *instruments of labour*. The use of instruments distinguishes human beings from animals. The labourer uses some substances of nature, such as wood, stones, or animals, in order to make other substances serve his aims.



"Thus Nature becomes one of the organs of his activity, one that he annexes to his own bodily organs, adding stature to himself in spite of the Bible".<sup>30</sup>

The subjects of labour and the instruments of labour form together the *means of production*. Human labour and the means of production form together the *productive forces*, though this expression does not seem to occur frequently in "Capital".

The elementary factors introduced so far constitute the material basis for all human life and history. They are present in any production, be it in a traditional society long ago or in the technologically most advanced society today. But the process of production obviously differs tremendously in, e.g., a primitive agricultural society and modern capitalist society. One source of difference lies in the tools which are used. "It is not the articles made, but how they are made, and by what instruments, that enables us to distinguish different economic epochs"<sup>31</sup>

Stone, bronze and iron as the materials used for tools distinguish whole epochs. Tools are indicators of change. Whether you use a charka or a modern spinning machine decides not only over the level of productivity but also over the conditions of work. A charka can be used at home—it can even accompany dignitaries on their travels abroad—but a spinning machine requires the set-up of a factory. That is why Marx pays a lot of attention to the development of technology and its implications, as we will see later. However, technological development alone is not sufficient to distinguish epochs and societies. The other basic characteristic which is needed is that of the *relations of production*.

The relations of production are the relations not between the human producers and Nature, but between the human beings themselves as they occupy different places in society as a result of the *division of labour* which is another basic characteristic of human production.

The social division of labour as it is called develops in two ways. On the one hand a division of labour develops within a family or tribe according to sex and age. Men may go for hunting or war while women and the younger ones take care of the household and productive activities around the house, such as agriculture. Another social division of labour arises when different communities whose products are different—e.g. grains and fish—start exchanging their surplus products as commodities. In the course of historical



development the social division of labour brings the separation of town and country, of agriculture, industry and trade, and of economic, political, cultural and religious functions of society. Division of labour in society, necessary as it is, is not only the basis for progress in productivity, etc., but also for exploitation and oppression. Men use it to exploit women. Technologically advanced nations use it to exploit countries which are dependent on exporting their raw materials. And intellectual workers use their monopoly over information, etc., to exploit manual workers.

This social division of labour in society has to be distinguished from the division of labour in the workshop or the *technical* division of labour which has been developed in capitalism and which will be discussed in connection with the analysis of capitalism.<sup>32</sup>

The social division of labour and the increase of productivity which results from it leads to various forms of relations of production, i.e. relations between the *owners of the means of production* and the actual *producers* who spend their *labour power*. Here the pattern of ownership is the decisive question. Marx even equates relations of production with property relations. Sometimes the owners are also the producers. If all are owners and producers at the same time we have a classless society, as in the case of primitive tribes. But as society develops distinctions arise between those who control the means of production—and thus the fruits of production—and those who do the actual labour. These distinctions which we call class distinctions take various forms in history. In some ancient kingdoms as in China and India the producers lived in village communities whereas the central state claimed a tribute from them. In the societies of Greece and Rome the producers were mainly slaves, whereas the free citizens as the private owners of the means of production and of the slaves controlled the production. In feudal society in Western Europe the producers were peasant serfs who worked partly on their own land, partly on the land of their feudal lords. In capitalist society one class owns privately the means of production, the class of capitalists, and another class which doesn't own any means of production has no other choice than to sell its labour power for a wage, the working class. Thus we can speak of tributary, feudal and capitalist relations of production.

This is one of the key questions we have to ask when we analyse a situation, for instance in a village or a taluk. Who owns the land and the bullocks—the means of production—and who does the work, who are the producers? Are the producers independent peasants or tenants who lease land from the owners or landless labourers who



work for a wage, or perhaps both? By inquiring into this we get a picture of the relations of production. This, of course, has to be fitted into a picture of the dominant relations of production in Indian society as a whole.

According to Marx the relations of production form the *economic structure* of society. And this economic structure is the basis not only for the other aspects of economic life, such as distribution and consumption, but also for the whole of society with its other structures.

#### *b. Superstructure*

The problem here is that Marx coined concepts only for the analysis of the economic base. His work remained very much incomplete and he did not get time to go into a detailed analysis of what he called the superstructure in its various aspects. That is one of the major tasks of marxist theory after Marx which is still largely unfulfilled. It is even unclear what belongs to the superstructure. Is it everything which does not belong to the economic structure? What about the social structure with its relations of family and caste which play such a tremendous role in Indian society? On the one hand these relations are closely connected with the economic base, with division of labour and property relations, on the other hand they are also closely interwoven with religious assumptions and taboos. Indian Marxists are taking up the challenge of analysing the social structure in this double connection with the economic base and the superstructure.

Actually it is difficult to give a clear picture of superstructure on the basis of Marx's writings. He uses it in various ways, which shows that it was not meant as a precisely defined scientific concept but rather as an image, a metaphor to indicate relations in a general way. Sometimes it looks as if only the legal and political structures belong to it, the laws, the political institutions and the state apparatus. That is how it sounds first in the famous "Preface to the Critique of Political Economy". There Marx speaks of the economic structure as the

*"real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness"* <sup>33</sup>

A few sentences further he speaks of the transformation of the "entire immense superstructure" in the epoch of social revolution and refers to "the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, ideological—forms in which men become conscious" of the economic conflict and fight it out. Here superstructure comprises a broad spectrum of political, religious and cultural practices as ideological forms in which people become conscious of the basic



economic conflict.

Still another use we find in an earlier text of Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (1851-2), where he writes:

*"Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought and views of life. The entire class creates and forms them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social relations"* <sup>34</sup>

Here superstructure refers to a class view of the world, to the ideology of a class.

These various uses of the image of base-superstructure have led some marxist authors to distinguish various meanings. Jakubowski distinguishes between 1) political and legal superstructure and 2) ideological superstructure.<sup>35</sup> Raymond Williams lists three meanings of superstructure in Marx's thinking: 1) legal and political forms which express existing relations of production; 2) forms of consciousness which express a particular class view of the world; and 3) a process in which, over a whole range of activities, people become conscious of a fundamental economic conflict and fight it out. These three meanings would direct our attention respectively to (1) institutions; (2) forms of consciousness; (3) political and cultural practices.<sup>36</sup>

We will discuss the analysis of political institutions and of ideology and culture more in detail in later chapters.

### *c. Relationship of base and superstructure*

Why did Marx use the image of base and superstructure? Often it is understood as an image which expresses a causal relationship. The economic base is then seen as the cause, and whatever is in the superstructure as its effect. That is certainly a misunderstanding of what Marx meant. This misunderstanding must be the result of the pre-suppositions of a mechanical materialism which looks at matter as the cause of everything else. Marx considered such materialism as bad metaphysics, as philosophical speculation which leaves out human practice.

The image of base and superstructure does not at all imply a cause-effect relationship. It reminds of the superstructure of a house or of a ship and says that it has to be seen in connection with its foundation, its base. It says that a superstructure does not exist independently. But it does not say that it is caused by its base. A house is not caused by its foundation, nor is the bridge of a ship caused by its



substructure. But they are determined by their base. They rest upon it—they belong together with it. The ideas of people are not caused by economic relations, but they are the ideas of people whose life is determined by certain economic and social conditions. That connection has to be understood. The point is to see that the superstructure does not hang in the air, that it does not exist independently, and that it has to be understood in close connection with the base on which it is erected. Marx argues against those who separate ideas from their material social context and treat them as something autonomous. The image of base and superstructure thus illustrates Marx's method of analysis which does not isolate politics from economics, or philosophy from history, or morality from class background, but wants to explain politics and philosophy and morality in connection with the mode of production.

The purpose is *explanation*, not *reduction*. Marx does not intend to reduce everything else to economic causes. He does not deny the reality of the superstructure. What he aims at is to relate everything to the whole of society by exploring its connection with the economic foundation of a particular society. For example, caste needs not to be reduced to class in a historical materialist approach. Such a procedure would fail to explain why at all class produced such a tenacious phenomenon as caste. The point is rather to explain the roles which caste plays whatever its complex causes including economic and non-economic factors—in connection with the successive economic structures and the forms of society based on them. This helps to explain how caste can change the roles it plays in the course of history.

A *direct correspondence* with the economic base is very clear in the legal superstructure.<sup>37</sup> Marx even identifies the relations of production with the relations of property as their legal expression. Concepts such as property, sale and purchase, rent, mortgage, etc., are legal concepts “which directly express particular economic relationships”. However, even law develops a *relative autonomy*. It develops a legal system with its own inner logic. As Engels puts it:

“As soon as the new division of labour which creates professional lawyers becomes necessary, another new and independent sphere is opened up which, for all its general dependence on production and trade, has also a specific capacity for reacting upon these spheres. In a modern state, law must not only correspond to the general economic condition and be its expression, but must also be an internally coherent expression which does not, owing to internal conflicts, contradict itself. And in order to achieve this, the faithful



*reflection of economic conditions suffers increasingly*".<sup>38</sup>

In other aspects the relationship between base and superstructure is still more complicated. With regard to politics this will be discussed in the chapter on the state. With regard to ideology, morality, religion, etc., Marx emphasizes on the one hand the material base of the production of ideas, criticizing all idealistic illusions about the independent existence of ideas. Instead of descending from heaven to earth as German philosophy does, he says in "German Ideology", one has to ascend from earth to heaven and see the origin of all forms of consciousness in the material human practice. At an early stage of history this is more easy to discern than at a later stage when all sorts of expressions of consciousness have assumed a life of their own.

*"The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life"*.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, Marx continues, ideology, morality, religion, etc., should not be studied separately but in connection with the material base from which they originate.

*"Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life"*.<sup>40</sup>

This line of approach has led many followers of Marx to reductionism as the old Engels later would complain. But already here it should be noted that Marx does not speak of the economic structure as base, but of "life" and of "real, active men" as they are involved in material production and intercourse, as the starting point. In his analysis of the labour-process he emphasizes later that human labour is characterised by the fact that human beings set and pursue their own aims in their interaction with Nature. They don't produce by instinct, but construct in their imagination before they actually produce.<sup>41</sup> This shows the interwovenness of ideas and material activity from another angle, namely ideas preceding production. These ideas are again conditioned by all sorts of factors, but certainly not only economic factors. The architect of Marx's example may not only construct houses, godowns and factories, but also theatres and temples. And even the shape of factories may not be determined by economic



factors alone.

Obviously, the image of base-superstructure should be handled very carefully. Engels saw the dangers of abuse at the end of his life. He complains in a letter that many young marxists take the historical materialist conception of history not as a guide to solid and detailed study but as a theory which gives prefabricated answers. "The materialist conception of history has a lot of dangerous friends nowadays who use it as an excuse for not studying history".<sup>42</sup>

He especially draws attention to two widespread *misunderstandings of historical materialism* which were partly caused by Marx and himself, as they in their polemics had to emphasize so much the decisive role of the economic base that their followers started thinking that nothing else mattered. In a letter to Franz Mehring he comments on an essay "On Historical Materialism", and first notices that one point is lacking,

*"which, however, Marx and I always failed to stress enough in our writings and in regard to which we are all equally guilty. That is to say, in the first instance we all laid and **were bound to lay**, the main emphasis on the **derivation** of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of actions arising through the medium of these notions, from basic economic facts. But at the same time we have on account of the content neglected the formal side—the manner in which these notions, etc., come about".*<sup>43</sup>

The development of thought is based on the economic development and cannot be properly understood independently. That is the fundamental insight of historical materialism. But that does not mean that the thinkers who produce ideas derive them directly from the material base. They work with ideas of the past, correct them, develop them, etc. They move in a sphere of thought which they may experience as an independent world. They are not aware of the "real motive forces". The way in which they produce their ideas has to be studied, Engels says. And Jakubowski concludes that an analytic social psychology is needed. Since ideas and ideologies are not produced directly by relations of production, but by human beings, it has to be studied how they are producing ideas. Historical materialism should "not be confused with a science that regards economic interests as the only historically effective motive". People can be moved by non-economic motives as well, as the social background of many revolutionaries shows. Historical materialism is "not a theory of motivation". "It is based on the thesis that social life is determined by economic relations". Within that framework people can be motivated



by various forces.<sup>44</sup>

The second misunderstanding which Engels mentions in his letter to Mehring is the idea “that because we deny an independent historical development to the various ideological spheres which play a part in history we also deny them any *effect upon history*”.<sup>45</sup> He ascribes this misunderstanding to an “undialectical conception of cause and effect”. “These gentlemen often almost deliberately forget that once an historic element has been brought into the world by other, ultimately economic causes, it reacts, and can react on its environment and even on the causes that have given rise to it”.<sup>46</sup> In other words, ideas do play an active role in history, though they are determined by the mode of production.

In a letter to Borgius Engels expressed the dialectical relationship as follows:

*“Political, legal, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic basis. One must not think that the economic situation is **cause, and solely** active, whereas everything else is only passive effect. On the contrary, interaction takes place on the basis of economic necessity, which ultimately asserts itself”*<sup>47</sup>

Marx reflects on the interaction with the material base in the following words:

*“Man himself is the basis of his material production, as of any other production that he carries on. All circumstances, therefore, which affect man, the **subject** of production, more or less modify all his functions and activities, and therefore too his functions and activities as the creator of wealth, of commodities. In this respect it can in fact be shown that **all** human relations and functions, however and in whatever form they may appear, influence material production and have a more or less decisive influence on it”*<sup>48</sup>

Once more we have to remember that the distinction between base and superstructure is made only for methodological reasons. We cannot study everything simultaneously, so we may have a separate look at religious traditions or moral values. But in reality everything is interwoven. It is not economy here and culture there. In reality we have to do with *people* who are involved in production, in caste conflicts, in sexual relations, in day-dreaming, in worship, in thinking. Sometimes that what they feel and think can be traced to organised religion or to a clear ideological orientation. Often it is the result of traditions,



habits, attitudes which cannot so easily be classified. But in any case, all these elements play a role all the time in our behaviour, inside and outside our place of work, and not in a separate "superstructural" realm. A traditional villager does not only react as a landless labourer in his encounter with a would-be organiser from the town. Neither is a modern manager behind his desk in an air-conditioned room necessarily only motivated by economic considerations. Obviously the mechanical character of the image base-superstructure makes it difficult to express this "interwovenness" of all aspects in human practice. That is why marxist historians like Thompson are very sceptical of the usefulness of this image.<sup>49</sup> Indeed the dialectic of social being and social consciousness is much more appropriate to express both the determination and the interwovenness in historical practice.

What distinguishes marxism from other theories is not that it denies the active role of other factors, but that it views the interaction in connection with the economic basis as the decisive factor in the final analysis. Even this is subject to change, as economic necessity will be brought under control. The aim is after all that people more and more will subject the economic development to their collective will.<sup>50</sup> So far human beings have been conditioned by the mode of production of material life. But communism is conceived as a rational order of society in which people through collective planning shape and determine the conditions of material production. Of course, the permanent necessity of interaction with nature will be there, but as human beings take control over the development of society, the assumptions of the materialist conception of history will be no longer valid in the old way.<sup>51</sup>

## 5. Dialectics

Some readers may complain that the marxist approach as presented so far makes everything look rather more complicated instead of giving clearcut answers with which one could easily work. This complaint is very understandable. But there is a limit to the possibilities of explaining marxism in simple terms—though the present author does not claim to have reached those limits. Why? Because of dialectics. Marxism understands reality in a dialectical way. That is more realistic, more true to reality, and therefore also more helpful, but it is also more difficult.

### *a. Society as a totality*

It is not easy to explain what dialectics is and what a dialectical way of thinking is. Dialectical thinking is like walking and swimming. One



can learn it only by doing. It is a way of approaching reality which we learn to follow as we try it out. The preceding discussion on the relationship of base and superstructure and of social being and consciousness can be taken as an exercise in dialectical approach. It looked at the different elements in society, the various structures and aspects in their inter-relationship and inter-action, and thus it took them as parts of a whole. That is one of the main characteristics or rather presuppositions of the dialectical approach that it takes society as a whole, as a complex totality. Science as we know it in capitalist society usually isolates one part of reality and makes it its exclusive object. This has also happened in the study of society. Political scientists study political systems, constitutions, etc., economists study economic laws, and sociologists social structures and phenomena. But society itself is a totality consisting of closely interrelated and interacting economic, political, social and ideological structures. How are they inter-related, how is this totality structured, that is a key question for any comprehensive understanding of society as a whole. It is one thing to know the pattern of ownership in a village. It is a second thing to know its caste pattern. It is a third thing to know its political affiliations and cultural patterns. But the most important thing is to get an understanding of the connection and interaction of all these factors.

The dialectical approach of historical materialism attempts to understand this interaction in society as a whole starting from the economic reality of material production, but not reducing reality to it. It is the opposite of causal determinism which reduces the complex reality to certain causes. It emphasizes that the totality has to be understood in the framework of the economic structure of a society, but it does so in order to understand how the other non-economic factors play their own role on that base. Exactly that is one aspect of dialectics, the dialogue, the interaction, between the various elements of a whole.

In a footnote in "Capital" Marx responds to an objection against this historical materialist approach as he had presented it in his "Preface to A Critique of Political Economy". One author had agreed that the mode of production determined the character of social, political and intellectual life in modern capitalist society, "in which material interests preponderate". But according to him it did not apply to the Middle Ages in which not the mode of production but Catholic religion dominated society, and it did not apply to the society of ancient Athens and Rome where politics dominated the scene. In his response Marx



agrees that "here politics and there Catholicism played the chief part". But he asks why this was so. And he answers that one can understand only why religion and politics could play such a dominant role when one looks into the mode in which these societies gained their livelihood.<sup>52</sup> In other words, religion and politics can even play the dominant role, but this can be understood only in the total framework of those societies as a whole, as they are determined by the economic base.

*b. The process of change*

A second crucial aspect of dialectics is that it allows to study the process of change in society. The dialectical method looks at society as a totality, but it sees that totality not as a permanent static construction governed by eternal laws. It sees a particular form of society as a totality which is in a permanent process of change. It is a historical whole. It has a beginning and an end in the course of history, and it makes place for a new set-up, a different type of society which is governed by other rules. Tribal society was born at the dawn of human history and died. Ancient empires of Mesopotamia, India and China have risen and gone down. They had their own typical structures. The slave-based societies of Greece and Rome made a great impact on history but they did not last. Feudal society existed for some centuries in Europe, but it had to give way to capitalist society which had grown in its womb. And already advances have been made to go beyond capitalism and to build socialist societies. And while they exist, all these forms of society undergo internal changes.

Actually it is one of the main trusts of Marx' theoretical work to show that there are no eternal laws governing the economic life of society. Bourgeois political economy had attempted to formulate economic laws of universal character, suggesting that capitalism based on these laws would last forever. Marx showed that economic laws are of a historical and thus relative character. They are valid only for a particular form of society like capitalism. Capitalism has a beginning in history and will come to an end, and on the way it undergoes many changes. Marxist dialectics try to analyse these processes of historical change.

In a commentary on the method used in "Capital" somebody compared Marx' scientific methodology with that of biology. The author writes:

*"The old economists misunderstood the nature of economic laws when they likened them to the laws of physics and chemistry. A more thorough analysis of phenomena shows that social organisms*



differ among themselves as fundamentally as plants or animals".<sup>53</sup>

Marx indeed uses biological analogies, for example, when he speaks of the "embryo capitalist" who develops into a "full grown capitalist".<sup>54</sup> The German version expresses even more strikingly the qualitative change taking place by speaking of the capitalist caterpillar who turns into a capitalist butterfly. The author quoted above continues:

*"The scientific value of such an enquiry lies in the disclosing of the special laws that regulate the origin, existence, development, death of a given organism and its replacement by another and higher one"*

Marx comments that this interpretation gives a picture of his dialectical method which

*"regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence..."*<sup>55</sup>

That is why the dialectical method is "critical and revolutionary". It does not take things as they are only, but looks at them in the perspective of change. It asks how they originate and to what they are leading. It is one thing to contemplate and to describe the misery of the proletariat in early capitalism. That still can lead to the conclusion that nothing much can be done about it apart from some alleviating charity. But looking at it dialectically Marx saw the misery of the proletariat as the product of capitalist exploitation and as the starting point from where the proletariat would take up the struggle imposed on it and thus become the gravedigger of capitalism.

### c. Mediation

Both totality and change are the result of what is called in dialectical language "mediation". Any totality, be it society as a whole, or a human person, or a particular event or phenomenon, is a complex whole which has to be understood as a result of relationships and their interactions, their mediation.

Firstly, everything is what it is only in *relationship* to something else. Take for example the human person. He or she can be understood only in his or her social relationships. When a stranger enters our place and we try to find out who he is, we start inquiring about his relationships: what is your name, where are you from, what language do you speak, are you married, what is your profession, etc. Asking these questions we assume that we can get to know a person through



his social relations. Of course, that is not all to be said about a person. As a subject he relates actively to these different aspects of society. But as a unique individual he is mediated through the society in which he lives. Or take the example of a commodity. It is a commodity only because it satisfies certain human needs. Through these needs it gets its use-value. In dialectical terms, these needs “mediate” its use-value. Or look at capital. It becomes capital only in relation with labour power. Capital is “mediated” through the social relation of labour power and private ownership of the means of production.

Secondly, mediation takes place through relationships of *contradiction*. Dialectics assumes that a totality or a particular relationship develops inner contradictions. It gets polarised into opposite moments which negate each other and through negation mediate each other. A commodity for example has two opposite moments: that of use-value and that of exchange-value (see the next chapter). The aspect of use-value negates that of exchange value. One can have the commodity only in one way at a time either for use or for sale. And yet, it is exactly the unity of those opposite and mutually exclusive aspects which makes a commodity. A commodity is only a commodity if it has both, an use-value and an exchange-value. The dialectic of use-value and exchange-value leads to the evolution of money and helps to explain the dynamics of commodity production. In its turn money develops its inner contradictions, its dialectic. And thus it is the contradictions which push the development forward.

With this dialectical approach Marx is able to show how the contradictions which develop in society eventually lead to revolutionary transformation. In capitalism, for example, we see how the class of capitalist owners and the class of proletarian workers are two opposite moments in a contradictory relationship. They need each other, they mediate each other, together they form the unity of capitalist society. But as the contradiction between them sharpens it may lead to a revolutionary conflict and to a transition towards a new type of society.

Marx does not assume that historical change happens only through the development and sharpening of inner contradictions, through self-development as it were, as it was the case with the transition from feudalism to capitalism. He also reckons with the possibility of change through external relations, for example through conquest, as in the case of ancient Rome or later colonialism. History is an open process. Dialectics is the opposite of reductionism, of a way of thinking which reduces everything to a few general laws. It provides the possibility to consider the creative role of specific conditions, which mediate the



general tendencies. For example, there has been a general tendency in the 20th century in the colonised countries to rise against colonial domination. But this process took very different forms because of different specific conditions in countries like India, Indonesia and Vietnam.

*d. Negation of the negation*

One form of contradictions which develops in the dialectical process of change is the formation of institutions, of fixed structures which start obstructing the process of dynamic evolution. Certain institutions become fetters of society which prevent further development of the available potential. They become a “negation” of the potential of social and economic development. Marx saw this happening in the *dialectic of productive forces and relations of production*. The productive forces were hampered in their development by the production relations of feudal society with its hierarchical system of privileges. The bourgeois revolution created new laws and institutions which protected private property and the operations of the free market so that production and commerce could develop along capitalist lines. But the same institutions of private property and market, the relations of production of capitalism become fetters in their turn. In the often quoted words of Marx:

*“At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression of the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed”.*<sup>56</sup>

Elsewhere Marx calls this revolutionary transformation in dialectical terminology “negation of the negation”. The fetters are the negation of the potential for development. The revolution negates this negation and thus sets the forces which were fettered free. The German word used in this connection—“Aufhebung”—conveys three meanings at the same time which are all a part of the dialectical process of change. It means a) the abolishing of the fetters; b) the preservation of the positive, rational features of the potential of the past; c) the lifting up to a higher stage of development. That is to say that revolution does not destroy everything, or should not destroy everything. It negates the negation only, it abolishes only what fetters the old society, its chains, its obsolete institutions. It does this in order to set free the positive



elements which were fettered, and it lifts all this up to a new level of further development.

For example, the proclamation of human rights was one of the revolutionary achievements of the bourgeois revolution, a tremendous advance in comparison to the previous situation. One of the rights, the right of private property, became a fetter which prevented the full realisation of the democratic rights of freedom and equality. A socialist revolution should be the negation of the negation, of the right of private property, so as to finally make the promise of freedom and equality which was the rational and positive element in the bourgeois revolution become reality by integrating the human rights on a higher level.

Marx himself uses the terminology of "negation of the negation" in his chapter on the "Historical tendency of capitalist accumulation".<sup>57</sup> The starting point of his survey is the private property of petty producers, peasants who have their own land which they cultivate, and artisans who work with their own tools. As owners-workers they are very productive, but only on a petty scale. Their private property of the means of production negates, excludes the concentration of the means of production; division of labour and co-operation on a large scale which would lead to the "free development of the social productive powers". This system of production brings forth the "material agencies for its own dissolution"

*"from that moment new forces and new passions spring up in the bosom of society (Marx may think of technology and the greed for profit); but the old social organisation fetters them and keeps them down. It must be annihilated; it is annihilated. Its annihilation, the transformation of the individualised and scattered means of production into socially concentrated ones, of the petty property of the many into the huge property of the few, the expropriation of the great mass of the people from the soil, from the means of subsistence, and from the means of labour, this fearful and painful expropriation of the mass of the people forms the prelude to the history of capital".<sup>58</sup>*

Marx adds that this expropriation was accomplished "with merciless vandalism, and under the stimulus of passions the most infamous, the most sordid, the pettiest, the most meanly odious". The outcome was that "self-earned private property" of independent producers was supplemented by "capitalist private property" based on exploitation of wage-labour.

Once this process has led to the development of capitalist society



according to its own laws, further expropriation takes a new form. Centralisation of capital is a law of capitalism. One capitalist kills many others. At the same time the labour process acquires more and more a co-operative form. The working class grows and gets united. "The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production". The contradiction is solved when the "expropriators—the capitalists—are expropriated". That is the negation of the negation. Capitalist private property was the negation of individual private property founded on the labour of the owner.

*"But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of the negation. This does not re-establish private property for the producer, but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era: i.e., on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production".<sup>59</sup>*

#### *e. The dialectic of theory and practice*

In the above quotation Marx speaks in terms of dialectical laws of capitalist development which with the inexorability of a law of nature lead to its end. This has led many marxists to develop a deterministic view of history. They forget that Marx in his theoretical production presupposed another dialectic, that of theory and practice. He discloses the laws of capitalist development in order to encourage and orient the proletariat in its historical action.

In the history of Marxism, especially in the period of the Second International (Kautsky), revolution was expected as the inevitable outcome of the sharpening of the contradiction between productive forces and production relations, as if this had nothing to do with human action, as if this was a matter of structures making history. But when Marx speaks of "social revolution" he assumes that human action plays the crucial role in the process of historical change. Nothing happens without that. The contradictions don't evolve apart from people. Human beings are at the heart of it. Society is human-made and the contradictions in society are human-made. And it is human beings who fight them out. However, they do this not as individuals but as members of classes, as people who occupy a particular place in society and its conflicts. The contradictions in society take the form of *class struggles*. And the outcome of the struggle depends on the consciousness which the classes involved develop of their role and interests.

Marx was mainly interested in the new contradiction developing



within capitalism and the class struggle based on it. At the outset of his career he had formulated the sentence:

*"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it".<sup>60</sup>*

In the proletariat he discovered the historical force which would be able to bring about the revolutionary change from capitalist class society to a classless society. He based the hope that the proletariat would fulfill this revolutionary task on its situation and place in capitalist society. It is a class with "radical chains", undergoing "universal suffering", and therefore it is a class which can emancipate itself from its slavery and suffering only by overthrowing the capitalist system which enslaves and alienates it. It is a class whose human needs cannot be satisfied within capitalist society and which therefore has to develop "radical needs", the need of a new society and thus the need for a revolutionary overthrow of the old society.

Marx saw his theory as expression of the revolutionary practice of the proletariat. For him theory was not something separate, not a set of doctrines which had to be applied, coming from outside. He saw his theory as the expression of the material reality of society, and especially of the situation of the working class in that society. It was meant to express in theoretical form what is happening in reality, and to articulate the radical needs which the proletariat has but may be not yet conscious of. Thus theory and revolutionary practice of the proletariat form a dialectical unity. They are two different forms of the same movement which need each other. The theory helps the workers to understand their situation. Once they understand their situation, they cannot but become revolutionary, because they will know that there is no other way out.

*"The weapons of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses".<sup>61</sup>*

From today's perspective it may look as if Marx had an idealistic picture of the proletariat and its radical needs. But he based his concept of the unity of theory and practice on concrete observations of the development of working class consciousness in those early days of the 1840's. He was deeply impressed by what he saw happening in the associations of workers in Brussels and Paris. He saw in it a glimpse of the future communist society which as a whole would be based on association.



*“When communist artisans associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need—the need for society—and what appears as a means becomes an end... Such things as smoking, drinking, eating, etc., are no longer means of contact or means that bring them together. Association, society and conversation, which again has association as its end, are enough for them; the brotherhood of man is no more phrase with them; but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work-hardened bodies”.*<sup>62</sup>

Working two decades later on “Capital” he would no longer speak the language of “brotherhood of man”, but he still would base his theoretical effort on the practice of the working class. In his chapter on the “Working day” he reflects on the spreading struggle for a normal working day by the working class in Britain, France and United States, and brings out the revolutionary implications of this “protracted civil war” which had “grown instinctively out of the conditions of production”.<sup>63</sup>

Just like Marx did not believe in theory separated from practice, he also did not believe in practice without theory. Revolutionary theory, revolutionary consciousness is needed for a revolution to happen and to become successful. Theory without practice is impotent. Practice without theory is blind.

## **6. Successive Modes of Production**

Marx developed his analytical tools of the materialist conception of history and the dialectical method primarily in connection with his study of capitalism. Though he was deeply interested in the universal history of humankind and while he made several preliminary studies of pre-capitalist societies, his main focus was to analyse the laws which govern the development of capital. The findings of that analysis will be discussed in the next chapter. This paragraph concludes the discussion of historical materialism by raising the question whether and how Marx’ theory implies a theory of human history as a whole.

Did Marx give a scientific picture of the totality of social development? Did he discover dialectical laws which govern history in its totality? Did he formulate not only laws of capital but also laws of history? These questions are widely discussed at present among marxists all over the world. Especially Stalin had propagated and popularised an universal, uniform and unilinear scheme of historical development. According to it all human history evolves in five



successive stages: Primitive Communism - Slavery - Feudalism - Capitalism - Communism. It was supposed that following the laws of dialectical change each stage would necessarily evolve out of the contradictions of the preceding stage. Thus dialectics had been turned into an iron framework in which all human history had to be fitted. However, this is as well against the very spirit of dialectics and thus against Marx—as it is against available historical evidence. Marxist theoreticians therefore have discarded this scheme of Stalin, though it still can be found in popular introductions to marxism.

A review of the historical evidence shows that no society went through all the stages. All human history started from primitive tribal communities. But once they broke up different types of society emerged. In China, in Egypt, in India, and in some other areas kingdoms arose in which the centralised state played a crucial role in providing public works especially in the field of irrigation. These ancient empires or kingdoms were based on the tribute extracted from the producers who were either still organised in village communities—as in India—or subjected to more feudal patterns of control and ownership. Marx characterised this mode of production as the “asiatic mode of production”. Present day marxists propose to call it “tributary” or “*tribute-paying mode of production*”. Stalin chose to drop this mode from his Marx-quotations and historical schemes.

A different type of development of a rather exceptional form we find in ancient Greece and Rome where production was based mainly on slavery. Slavery existed elsewhere also but it did not play a dominant role. Especially domestic slaves may be found in societies based on tribute, but production itself was not based on slavery. Again another mode of production developed in Western Europe where from tribal society a feudal mode of production took form without ever going through a stage of slavery. On the other hand, at a much later stage in history, in the time of developing capitalism, slavery again played a role, though not a dominant one, in North America. Obviously the historical variety and “irregularity” is so wide that Stalin’s scheme appears rather absurd. The reasons why he insisted on it while leaving out the asiatic mode of production must have been an ideological one. The policies he imposed on Russia from above were so extraordinary that widespread resistance was bound to develop. To counter this resistance the policies were proclaimed to be the implementation of the iron, universal laws of history. And who can go against that!<sup>64</sup>

But did not Marx himself speak of successive modes of production and did he not see dialectic at work in the transition from one mode to



the other? He did, but not in the way which Stalin wanted him to be understood. When we leave aside the elimination of the asiatic mode, Stalin's view seems to be supported by the famous and often quoted passage of the Preface to "A Critique of Political Economy" (1859) in which Marx summarises his preceding studies and findings. There he writes:

*"In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society".<sup>65</sup>*

In the preceding section Marx had spoken of the relationship of base and superstructure and of the dialectical contradiction between productive forces and production relations which leads to revolutionary transformation (as already quoted). And following our present quotation Marx states that capitalism also has outlived itself. This context led to the understanding that Marx meant to say that all these modes of production are connected by an inner dialectic of change.

However, this cannot be the case. Afterwards we will see how Marx explains the transition from a simple commodity producing mode of production to the capitalist mode of production. The dialectical procedure which he follows in that case is clear and precise, whereas the formulations in the Preface are of a general and rather vague nature. "In broad outlines" is not the proper introduction to the formulation of a "law". What Marx is doing here is only sketching the main epochs of historical development in order to illustrate his point that society is changing and in the course of time is progressing. But the succession of "progressive epochs" does not necessarily mean that the one epoch evolves out of the other. The various developments can be arranged in a logical order of progress without implying a chronological or causal connection between each and every stage. Marx never claimed that each society has to go through all the progressive epochs as if this was an inescapable path prescribed by dialectical laws of history.

The study of his other writings confirm this. In "Grundrisse", the notebooks of 1857 (published only in 1939), we get an insight in the preparatory studies of Marx for his "Critique of Political Economy". One section deals in detail with the question of pre-capitalist societies.<sup>66</sup> Here Marx distinguishes three *alternative* forms of the break-up of communal society: that of the Asiatic system, that of Greek and Roman antiquity based on slavery, and that of West European feudalism.<sup>67</sup> This lengthy draft shows that Marx in his Preface (one or two years later) did not intend to speak of chronologi-



cally successive historical stages, but of historical evolution in a more general sense listing various stages in a logical order. This logical order is based on the observation of the various forms of property, of divisions of labour between town and countryside, and of the progress made towards the separation of the producer from the means of production which is the pre-condition for the capitalist mode of production to come into being. This systematic order does not imply that each society by the force of immanent laws has to pass on to the next logical stage. External events like conquests can interfere with the internal development and block it. Or internal contradictions lead to class struggles in which neither side wins. As Marx says in the Communist Manifesto, class struggles do not necessarily lead to revolutionary victory, they can end "either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes".<sup>68</sup>

The study of Marx' own views on historical development and the study of new historical material has led present-day marxist theoreticians to forward new proposals for an overall view of history in terms of various modes of production. These schemes give room to alternative roads of development, while they maintain that there is a general trend from primitive communism via different forms of traditional class societies based on ownership of land towards modern capitalism and socialism.<sup>69</sup>

One interesting proposal may be introduced here. It comes from the West African Marxist Samir Amin and is presented in his book "Unequal Development. An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism".<sup>70</sup> Like other Marxists Amin distinguishes between the purely theoretical model of "mode of production" and the societies as they exist in concrete reality which are called "social formations". Amin defines: "Social formations are concrete, organised structures that are marked by a dominant mode of production and the articulation around this of a complex group of modes of production that are subordinate to it".<sup>71</sup> For example, the slave owning mode is usually non-dominant, but can be found in a subordinate position linked with a dominant tribute paying mode or even with a dominant capitalist mode as in the USA until 1865.

Amin uses the *model of centre-periphery* in his picture of world history. He finds the tribute paying mode of production as developed in ancient Egypt, China and India to be the normal path of development after the communal mode of production. These were the centres of ancient civilisation. They lived and developed on the strength of their own internal dynamism. The slave-owning mode of



production on the other hand became dominant only in ancient Greece and Rome. This was an exceptional development in the periphery of the great centres of the world. The same can be said of the formations shaped by long-distance trade such as the Arab World. Its civilisation developed due to the interaction with the dominating centres.

Amin raises the question why the capitalist mode of production was born in Europe and not in China or India. He ascribes this to the very fact that China and India were centres of civilisation, whereas Europe's feudalism was the product of a backward and peripheral area. Capitalism required not only accumulation of capital. Such accumulation had as well taken place in China or the Arab world. But it also needs simultaneously a process of proletarianization which provides the supply of free labour power. This process took place on a mass scale in feudal Europe only. It was the lack of strong centralised state power in backward, barbarian Europe which left the peasantry unprotected in the hands of local feudal lords and which did not prevent the peasant to take refuge in the cities where they formed a proletariat. The same lack of central power allowed the urban bourgeoisie of merchants and artisans to acquire a high degree of independence. The modernization of agriculture drove further peasants into the cities. It was this peripheral development which created the conditions for the birth of capitalism in Europe. This turned Europe from a peripheral region into a new centre of world historical development which in the epoch of colonialism and imperialism assigned the role of periphery to other areas which once had been centres. In the process the capitalist mode of production develops in a more pure form in the centre, whereas it becomes only dominant in the social formations of the periphery. That is the situation at present in most of the Third World countries. The capitalist mode of production has become dominant, but it has not eliminated the previous modes of production. It has rather subordinated them. That makes the analysis of these social formations so complex. So far Amin.

The most important thing about Marxist dialectics in the study of history is not to project some general schemes. The crucial task is the analysis of the concrete social formations. Dialectics helps to understand these complex formations nevertheless as a totality, as a dialectical unity. In each form of society there are plenty of remnants of previous forms of society. In India this is very much the case. The dialectical task is to find out what in the totality of Indian society is the dominant, regulating, organising structure, the dominant mode of production, which determines the function and role of all other elements.



In order to be able to do this we need a clear understanding of the basic characteristics of the different modes. Marx particularly studied the character of the capitalist mode of production. To this we turn in the next chapter.

## NOTES

1. "German Ideology", Marx/Engels, Selected Works 1, 26.
2. Third thesis, *ibid.*, 13.
3. First thesis, *ibid.*
4. Capital I, 352.
5. "Holy Family", 1844, quoted by D. McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, London, 1971, 125.
6. Selected Works 1, 38.
7. Capital I, 19.
8. Capital III, 175
9. *ibid.*, 239.
10. Letter of Nov. 1877 in Marx/Engels, Selected Correspondence, 293.
11. *The Poverty of Theory*, Merlin Press, 1978, 249 ff. and especially 354 ff.
12. Quoted by Thompson, 354.
13. To Bloch, Sept. 1890, Sel. Corr., 396.
14. Letter to Schmidt. Aug. 1890, Sel. Corr., 393 f.
15. E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Age of Revolution 1789-1848", New York, 1962, and "The Age of Capital 1848-1875", London, 1975.
16. Capital I, 20.
17. Communist Manifesto, Sel. Works 1, 109.
18. To Meyer, 30.4.1867, Sel. Corr., 173.
19. About Althusser, see Ch. VI, 2.
20. Oxford University Press, 1977.
21. Engels to Bloch, Sel. Corr., 395.
22. Communist Manifesto, Sel. Works 1, 108.
23. For details, see Thompson, *op. cit.*, 342 ff.
24. Sel. Works 1, 503.
25. See F. Jakubowski, *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism*, London, 1976.
26. Capital I, 179.
27. *ibid.*, 174.
28. *ibid.*, 173.
29. *ibid.*, 174 & 177.
30. *ibid.*, 175.
31. *ibid.*



32. For a reference to the division of labour in ancient Indian communities, see *Capital I*, 337 ff.
33. *Sel. Works* 1, 503.
34. *Sel. Works* 1, 421.
35. *Ideology and Superstructure*, op. cit., 38.
36. *Marxism and Literature*, op. cit. 76 f.
37. The more complex and indirect relationship in the political superstructure will be discussed in Ch. III.
38. Letter to Schmidt, 27.10.1890, *Sel. Corr.*, 399.
39. *Selected Works* 1, 24 f.
40. *ibid.*
41. *Capital I*, 174.
42. To Schmidt, 5.10.1890, *Sel. Corr.*, 393.
43. 14.7.1893, *Sel. Corr.*, 433 f.
44. Jakubowski, op. cit., 55.
45. *Sel. Corr.*, 435.
46. *ibid.*
47. *Sel. Corr.*, 441; cf also letter to C. Schmidt, 396 ff.
48. *Theories of Surplus Value I*, 288.
49. *Poverty of Theory*, op. cit., 79 f.
50. To Borgius, 25.1.1894, *Sel. Corr.*, 442.
51. Cf. G. Lichtheim, *The Concept of Ideology and other Essays*, New York.
52. *Capital I*, 86.
53. quoted by Marx in Afterword to the Second German edition of *Capital*, *Capital I*, 28.
54. *Capital I*, 163.
55. *ibid.*, 29.
56. Preface 1859, *Sel. Works I*, 503 f.
57. Ch. XXXII, *Capital I*, 713 ff.
58. *Capital I*, 714.
59. *ibid.*, 715.
60. *Theses on Feuerbach*, *Sel. Works* 1, 15.
61. Marx/Engels, *Coll. Works* 3, 182
62. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, *Coll. Works* 3, 313.
63. *Capital I*, 283-285, cf. 264-286.
64. See for further argument B. Wielenga, *Marxist Views on India in historical perspective*, Madras, 1976.
65. *Sel. Works* 1, 504.
66. Separately published under the title "Pre-capitalist Economic Formations" by the british marxist historian E.J. Hobsbawm, New York, 1964.
67. For a summary, see Wielenga, *Marxist views.*, op. cit.



68. *Sel. Works* 1, 109.

69. See review in Wielenga, *Marxist views...*

70. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1979.

71. *ibid.*, 16.



## CHAPTER II

# Critique of Capitalism

### Introduction

The main work of Marx carries the title: "Capital". Marx spent many years of his life on the analysis of capitalism, because he was convinced that a thorough theoretical understanding was needed in order to facilitate the practical critique of capitalism, its overthrow by the proletariat.

The entry-point of his analysis, the angle from where he looks at capitalism and penetrates into its secrets, is the theory of capitalist economy. As the sub-title puts it, "Capital" is "A Critique of Political Economy". Political Economy stands for the economic theory developed by the classical bourgeois economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo.<sup>1</sup> Marx studied their theories in minute detail, as can be seen from the 3 volumes "Theories of Surplus-Value" which were meant to form the fourth volume of "Capital". Starting from their theories and subjecting their categories such as value, commodity, money, capital, etc., to a sharp critical analysis, Marx proceeds to expose the true nature of capitalism.

In the process he breaks down the powerful scientific legitimization of capitalist economy and not only provides a new scientific model for the analysis of capital, but lays the foundations for a fundamental critique of the totality of capitalism. Many marxists have taken "Capital" only as a textbook for the study of the economic doctrines of Marx, his theories of value and surplus-value, of concentration of capital, of crises, and of the tendency of the rate of surplus-value to fall. But Marx does not only give a better theoretical explanation of how capital works. Revealing the secret of capital as being the accumulation of dead labour and turning to the labour-process as the heart of the matter, he introduces fundamental reflections on human labour and human needs. Doing so he establishes—directly or indirectly—criteria for the rejection of capitalism as a dehumanizing system on



philosophical anthropological grounds.

This means that "Capital" is crucial for an understanding of the basic thrust of Marx' critique of capitalism. It does not mean that a study of "Capital" makes a study of our own concrete society superfluous. We even need further theoretical tools for that. But the study of "Capital" will be essential for those who want to equip themselves for such a task.

## 1. Political Economy of Capitalism

### a. *The logic and history of capital*

There are two ways to study capitalism and to get to know its specific character and both ways we need in order to get a full understanding. The first way is to study its history, how it was born, how it developed, under which circumstances, and with what results. This requires a study not only of the economic process but of the development of the whole of bourgeois society. It is a wide field, as each country has its own history in this respect. Such studies have been undertaken and have to be undertaken by marxist scholars with the methods of historical materialism, analysing the interaction of economic, social, political, ideological and cultural processes within the overall framework of a particular social formation.

But such studies presuppose the second way to study capitalism, namely the systematic analysis of the economic structure of capitalist society. In that case one has to start not from the historical origins, but from the capitalist system as a totality. That is the approach which Marx follows in "Capital". Historically one would have to begin with agriculture and the category of ground-rent. Ground-rent still exists in bourgeois society, but it does not provide the key to understanding its economy. For that one has to turn to capital itself.

*"Capital is the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society. It must form the starting-point as well as the finishing-point, and must be dealt with before landed property. After both have been examined in particular, their interrelation must be examined".<sup>2</sup>*

By taking capital as starting-point and finishing-point Marx follows the path of *dialectical logic*. This method presupposes the concrete totality of the system, but for the sake of analysis it takes one part after the other till it is able to conceive and present how all aspects, all relations, all categories, function as parts of the totality. Marx calls it the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete. The isolated part may look real and concrete, but it is an abstraction from the more



complex reality. It is the “rich totality of many determinations and relations” which forms the concrete reality.

“Capital” is constructed according to this dialectical logic. Volume I which is devoted to the analysis of “The Process of Production of Capital” is divided into 8 parts:

- I. Commodities and Money
- II. The Transformation of Money into Capital
- III. The Production of Absolute Surplus-Value
- IV. The Production of Relative Surplus-Value
- V. The Production of Absolute and Relative Surplus-Value
- VI. Wages
- VII. The Process of Accumulation of Capital
- VIII. So-called Primitive Accumulation
- IX. Results of the Immediate Process of Production

Part IX which sums up the previous parts has not been included in the version of “Capital” which Marx himself published. It has been discovered only recently among his manuscripts and gives important clues to the understanding of the whole.<sup>3</sup>

In the sequence of the 9 parts we see how Marx starting from one single abstracted part draws ever wider circles, including ever more dimensions of the process of production of capital, becoming ever more concrete. From the commodities to money, from money to capital, from capital to the labour process as the source of absolute surplus-value, and to division of labour and modern industry as the source of relative surplus-value, and to the relationship of the two. The part on Wages was originally planned as a separate volume. Part VII sums it all up—in the edition published by Marx—and Part VIII turns to the question of the historical conditions for the development of capitalism.

Volume I is only one part of the total analysis planned by Marx. It studies the process of *production* of capital. Volume II deals with the “process of circulation of capital”. Volume III takes a step towards a more concrete understanding of the process in its totality. It includes the discussion of landed property, profit and interest, competition, joint-stock companies, for which Marx at one stage had planned separate volumes. Volumes II and III were published by Engels after Marx’ death. Even they leave the work of Marx very much incomplete. In “Grundrisse” Marx ends his reflections on the dialectical method with an outline of the order which he intends to follow. This goes far



beyond what we have in the four volumes of "Capital"

*"The order obviously has to be (1) the general, abstract determinants which obtain in more or less all forms of society, but in the above-explained sense. (2) The categories which make up the inner structure of bourgeois society and on which the fundamental classes rest. Capital, wage labour, landed property. Their inter-relation. Town and country. The three great social classes. Exchange between them. Circulation. Credit system (private). (3) Concentration of bourgeois society in the form of the state. Viewed in relation to itself. The 'unproductive' classes. Taxes. State debt. Public credit. The population. The colonies. Emigration. (4) The international relation of production. International division of labour. International exchange. Export and import. Rate of exchange. (5) The world market and crises".<sup>4</sup>*

From a later letter to Engels in 1858 we know that Marx planned to produce six volumes. At least three of them are not incorporated in what has been published, and it is yet unknown how far Marx got with their preparation. Those are volumes on the State, on international trade, on the world market and crises.<sup>5</sup> Thus Marx did not reach the point of presenting the all-including concrete totality of capitalism.

However, volume I and the further outlay of his work, gives the thrust and shows the direction. This is not the presentation of an abstract unchanging model, but of a dynamic whole. The dialectical logic which moves from the abstract to the concrete evokes at the same time the insight into the dynamic, dialectical process of change that pushes towards the abolition of the capitalist mode of production. The flash-back to the Primitive Accumulation in Part VIII is not the only connection between the logic of "Capital" and history. The development from simple to more complex categories shows also a rough correspondence with the historical process.<sup>6</sup>

Commodities and money (I) were there before capitalism, and capitalism developed out of commodity economy (II). In its first phase capital produced surplus-value through the lengthening of the working day and other means of intensification of exploitation (III). This phase is characterised as the phase of the "Formal subsumption of labour under capital" in the unpublished chapter (IX). In the next phase capital revolutionises the process of labour through mechanization, technology, etc., and thus opens the era of the production of relative surplus value, based on the increase of productivity (IV). This Marx calls the "Real subsumption of labour under capital". Part VII overlooks the whole process as a process of accumulation. The very



categories used, “process”, “accumulation”, imply historical development. Yet all these processes and changes taking place once the capitalist mode of production has established itself can be characterised by a “General law of Capitalist Accumulation”. In so far the emphasis is on the logic of capital, showing how it works. The next part (VIII) turns back to history in a direct manner. It raises the question how the capitalist mode of production could come into being before its specific law of accumulation was operative. The answer is: through the so called Primitive Accumulation, not through the production of Surplus-value, not through economic means but through robbery and other forceful methods.<sup>7</sup>

In the following we can neither discuss all the theories forwarded by Marx in “Capital” nor can we go into the specifics of the historical development of capitalism. We can only try to highlight some of the main theoretical statements and refer to some of the main aspects of the historical process.<sup>8</sup>

#### *b. Commodity production and capitalist production*

A first characteristic of capitalist economy is that it is a form of *commodity production*, i.e. production for sale, production for the market. That is why Marx starts his analysis of the capitalist mode of production with the analysis of “Commodities”.<sup>9</sup> But not all commodity production is already capitalist production. Commodity production emerged thousands of years back in human history whereas capitalism is only a few hundred years old.

In primitive society all production is for direct use, there is no production for exchange on the market. Production of commodities, of goods for exchange, develops slowly. For a long time it plays only a subordinate role. Only in capitalist society commodity production becomes the completely dominant form of production, it becomes generalised. Even there production for direct consumption continues, in the households, in kitchen gardens, etc., and in a small part of the agricultural production. Analysing the mode of *simple commodity production*, Marx characterises the purpose as: to sell in order to buy. The peasant wants to sell some grain in order to buy some cloth. The weaver comes to sell some cloth in order to buy grain. The operation can be presented as C-M-C, i.e. Commodity-Money-Commodity. One sells one commodity in order to buy another commodity. Money is a means of exchange, just to make the transaction easier. The value of the two commodities, of C and C, is the same, is equivalent.

However, on the market place we find not only the peasant and the



artisan, but also the merchant. His economic operation is a different one: he buys in order to sell. He comes to the market not with commodities but with money. With that money he buys some product in order to sell it at a higher price: This operation can be presented as M-C-M, i.e. Money-Commodity-Money with increased value. This money which has been increased by a surplus-value is called capital.<sup>10</sup> Capital has been there long before capitalism, in the form of merchant capital or usurer-capital, money-lender capital. The difference is that these forms of capital derive their profit from their role in the exchange of commodities, in the sphere of *distribution*, of circulation, of the market. The usurer and the merchant appropriate part of the surplus-value which has been produced, but they don't control the production itself.

The capitalist mode of production comes into being when capital moves into the sphere of *production*, when it gets hold of the means of production and starts controlling and directing production itself. This is a long historical process which starts in Medieval Europe. Its basic characteristics are: a) The separation of the producer from his means of production; b) The concentration of the means of production in the hands of one class, the bourgeoisie; c) The formation of another class which has no means of subsistence other than the sale of its labour-power, the proletariat.

Capitalist production is impossible as long as the producers still own or control the means of production. As long as an artisan, a weaver or a carpenter, has his own tools and workshop, he will not voluntarily go and sell his labour-power and start working in a factory. As long as a peasant possesses some land he will prefer to work on it rather than get hired as a labourer. Capitalist production needs workers, people who sell their labour-power. Therefore it needs the *separation of producers and means of production*, so that the producers are forced by economic compulsion to sell their labour-power.

This separation has taken place in various ways, usually in a very brutal and bloody manner. "In actual history, it is notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly force, play the great part."<sup>11</sup> Marx has documented this for England in Capital I, Part VIII, Ch. 26 ff., showing that the "so-called primitive accumulation" is "nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production."<sup>12</sup> In the case of England in the 15th and 16th century, "the expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil" was "the basis of the whole process".<sup>13</sup> The various forms of exploitation discussed in Ch. 27 "conquered the field



for capitalist agriculture, made the soil part and parcel of capital and created for the town industries the necessary supply of a free and outlawed proletariat".<sup>14</sup> Mandel brings samples from modern times in Africa, showing how the colonial powers first had to uproot the black people who were living on the land in order to create the work force for their capitalist enterprises, for the mines and the plantations. The same can be studied in India in the tribal belt, e.g., where people are deprived of their livelihood in the forest and forced to become suppliers of cheap labour in the mines and around the steel factories.

The result of this process of separation is the formation of two classes which form the two poles of capitalist society. On the one side we find the bourgeoisie as the class of owners in whose hands the means of production are concentrated. On the other side we find the proletariat as the class which has to find its subsistence by the sale of its labour-power. The word *bourgeoisie* is a french word which is derived from "bourg", the word for small townlike centers in which merchants and artisans were living. From these inhabitants of the towns the later bourgeoisie arose, both from merchants and from well-to-do artisans who developed into entrepreneurs. The origins may be different from country to country, and it is important to study them in detail, because it makes a difference even a long time after whether the bourgeoisie of a country has its main roots in a commercial past or in artisan-production or in both.<sup>15</sup>

On the other side we find the *proletariat*, the class of producers who have lost control over their means of production and who therefore have only their labour-power to sell, and their children to replace them in the fields and factories once they are worn out. The word "proletariat" derives from the Latin word "proles" = children. Again the formation of this class took place in different ways in different countries. Marx mentions three possible origins in his unpublished chapter.<sup>16</sup> In the case of former slaves or serfs, who may have escaped to the towns and found employment as wage-labourers there, the form of subordination and compulsion changes. They may feel freer because they are only compelled by economic reasons to hire themselves out. But they are under compulsion and dependent all the same. A large number of wage-labourers originate from a quite different background. They were self-sustaining peasants before or independent artisans who have lost the independence which they had before. For them the subordination under capital is a loss of earlier freedom. Finally in the case of journey-men and apprentices the change in the form of subordination is also considerable. In the framework of the medieval



guild system the journey man and the apprentice are subordinated to the guild master, but not as wage-labourers to capitalists though they got a wage — but as in the relationship of students and professor. The master taught them the trade. Apart from run-away peasant serfs, ruined artisans and journey-men we may think of unemployed servants of the nobility and from the courts and other poor people flocking to the towns and joining the reservoir out of which the proletariat was formed.

At this point it is important to note: Firstly, bourgeoisie and proletariat are the basic classes of capitalist society, but not necessarily the only ones. Other classes may exist and intermediate sections, in various combinations. But capitalism is possible only if there is a class of owners on the one hand, and a class of non-owners on the other hand. Secondly, it is the relationship to the means of production which characterises these classes: Ownership/control and non-ownership. It is not simply a question of rich and poor. Not all poor people are workers. They may be petty artisans, or hawkers, or peasants who still own some piece of land. An industrial worker may earn more, and yet he is a member of the working class whereas the poor peasant-owner is not. This reminds us also that the working class is not homogeneous. It consists of various sections, skilled and unskilled, on daily wages or on monthly pay, under the poverty line and well above it, child labour in the match-industry of Sivakasi and highly skilled and better paid workers in the public sector. What unites them is that they are all forced to sell their labour power, be it under different conditions. A worker crosses the border-line of the working class only when his salary allows him to set up his own shop, to become a petty money-lender, or to start living or renting out huts in a slum.

A further pre-condition for the development of capitalism is the *expansion of the market*. Pre-capitalist small-scale commodity production works for a limited market. The carpenter or the weaver finds his customers in the town and its immediate environment. Things change when trade develops, export becomes possible, production for far away places gets underway. In the 16th century a commercial revolution took place in Europe. Discoveries of new trade routes opened the Vasco-da-Gama era of world-wide trade under colonial conditions. The expansion of the market encouraged large-scale production and thus the growth of capitalism. The capitalist entrepreneurs can emerge only when a certain scale of production has been reached. The guild master and his limited number of journey-men and apprentices do not produce enough for setting the master free to do only the directing and supervising work. The capitalist as director of an enter-



prise emerges with the scale of production growing larger.

c. *The production of Surplus-value*

With the market for commodity-production expanding and with a minimum of capital in the hands of a class of owners of the means of production and with a sufficient number of workers ready to be hired on the labour market, capitalist production can develop. Once it has gathered momentum it has its own internal dynamism to expand further and further. Marx calls it the “restless never-ending process of profit-making.”<sup>17</sup>

How does it work? The key answer of Marx is his theory of the production of surplus value. We remember that capital is formed when money ceases to be only a means of exchange which facilitates the exchange of commodities and when the increase of money, adding new value, becomes the aim of economic transactions. The usurer and the merchant try to achieve this in the sphere of the market. The capitalist entrepreneur does it by subordinating the process of production itself to this purpose. He buys raw materials, means of labour, etc., and he buys labour-power. The labourers are paid for the use, for the consumption of their labour-power by wages. Their products are appropriated by the owner of the means of production. After selling them he has made a profit. Where does this additional money come from? Has money the power to create more money? Is it the shrewdness of the capitalist? Of course, occasionally there may be a windfall through a shrewd operation. But that does not explain the general process of profit-making. There are occasional set-backs as well for various reasons. Marx finds the course of profit hidden in one particular commodity which the capitalist buys on the market. The commodity is labour-power.

Following Adam Smith, Marx distinguished in a commodity two aspects: they have an use-value and an exchange value. As an *use-value* a commodity is an article which can satisfy one or the other human need. But a commodity is not just an useful article, like the paddy which a peasant grows for his own consumption. It is an useful article which is produced to be sold on the market, to be exchanged with other commodities. How to measure the *exchange-value* of commodities which have different use-values? What do wheat and linen have in common? The one is produced by a peasant, the other by a weaver. They are the products of different types of *useful labour*. What they have in common is that they are both products of human labour in general, what Marx calls “*abstract human labour*”. On both products a certain amount of human labour has been spent. That



determines their exchange-value. The exchange-value or simply the value, as distinguished from the use-value, consists of the abstract labour incorporated in the commodity. The measure is not the time which the individual labourer may have spent which may be above or below average, but the average time needed on a given level of productivity, what Marx calls the “*socially necessary labour-time*”.

Capitalist production becomes possible when along with other commodities labour-power can be bought as a commodity. As any other commodity labour-power has an use-value for the buyer and an exchange-value for the seller. For the buyer, the capitalist, it has the use-value that it can work, produce. He uses, he consumes it for this purpose and pays the price—strange enough only afterwards—in the form of wages. For the worker his labour-power has only an exchange-value. He cannot use it for his own purposes, because he has no means of production. But he can sell it in order to make a living. The exchange-value is determined as in the case of every other commodity by the labour-time necessary for its production or reproduction, that means in this case by the cost of the “means of subsistence” needed to maintain the worker and his children, the future workers.<sup>18</sup> The level of subsistence and of essential needs varies from situation to situation according to the level of development and other factors.

The wages cover only what is needed to maintain the labourer, his value. But what he produces is more than that. The difference is called the *surplus-value*. This surplus is appropriated by the capitalist. To understand this concept of surplus-value it may be helpful to have a look at the historical development.

In early history people produced hardly enough for their own subsistence. As soon as they were able to increase their productivity and to produce a surplus—i.e. through cattle breeding instead of hunting—the question arose how this surplus was going to be used. In course of time it released a section of the people from work for their own subsistence, like chiefs and priests. They became the ruling class. Thereafter, we can analyse the labour of the producers as partly “*necessary labour*”, i.e. labour for their own subsistence, and partly “*surplus-labour*”, i.e. labour to maintain the ruling class. In the Middle Ages the serfs worked three days on their own lands for their own subsistence and three days on the lands of the feudal lord without being paid for it. With that surplus-labour they produced a social surplus which was appropriated by the ruling class. This appropriation can take place in different forms, in the form of kind—as in the case of



share-cropping or in the form of money (rent). In the case of money we speak of surplus-value.

For Marx the extraction of unpaid surplus-labour is the key to understand the different forms of society: rent paid to the landlord in feudal society, taxes paid to the state in Asiatic society. These forms are connected with different political structures, needed to enforce this extraction.<sup>19</sup> In capitalist society the appropriation of surplus-value happens in a new way. It is no longer the unpaid labour of slaves or serfs but the unpaid labour of wage-labourers. Workers in capitalist society receive wages. It seems they are paid for their work. That is the great mystification in capitalism which covers up the process of exploitation. Actually they are paid not for their work but for the use of their labour-power. What they produce is worth more than their wages. The wages cover only the cost of necessary labour, that what is needed to maintain the labourer. The value of what he produces is more than that. The difference, the surplus is appropriated by the capitalist. This is possible because labour-power is a commodity which can be bought on the market.

We will discuss in the next section more in detail how the extraction of surplus-value affects the workers. At this point we first mention the further aspects of Marx' theory of surplus-value. The capitalist tries to increase the rate of surplus-value. He has to as it is the purpose of capital to create additional value. This increase can be achieved in two ways: absolute and relative surplus-value. *Absolute surplus-value* is produced by "prolongation of the working day".<sup>20</sup> By such prolongation the time of surplus-labour is expanded. This method is especially applied in the earlier stages of capitalism. We find it still in the non-organised sector of industry in India.

*Relative surplus-value* arises from the "curtailment of the necessary labour-time", in other words from the increase of productivity. If a worker produces more in one hour than he did before, then the time needed to cover the supply of his means of subsistence (necessary labour-time) is shortened. This increase of productivity is pursued in many ways, including increasing supervision and discipline, piece-rate wages, and above all technological innovations (see section 2). Relative surplus-value becomes dominant in fully developed capitalism. It presupposes the accumulation of capital which is needed for further mechanisation and expanding of scale of production.

In the early stage of capitalism we find the extraction of surplus-value without the impressive and conspicuous technological revolution which characterises the later stage of capitalist development.



The level of technology is still more or less the same as in precapitalist society. Most other aspects of society are still un-changed or only slowly changing. But one decisive thing has changed: the labour process is subordinated to capital. The labourer is no longer an independent producer or a serf tied to the soil. He is under the control of the capitalist in one way or the other. Marx calls this the “*formal subsumption of labour under capital*”. Once capital has established its hold and has accumulated sufficiently it may proceed to the “*real subsumption of labour*” when it starts transforming the process of labour, re-organising it and bringing it on a new technological level.

It may be noted here that this distinction is relevant to the on-going debate about the dominant mode of production in India.<sup>21</sup> Whereas capitalist farmers in the Punjab get their crops sprayed with pesticides from small planes, there are sharecroppers in other parts of India making out a meagre existence in ways which seem to belong to a precapitalist form of society. But the appearance may be misleading. Even where no technological changes have taken place and where the old society still is alive culturally and ideologically, capital may already be in charge economically, through the formal subsumption of labour, extracting absolute surplus-value.

#### d. *The “never ending process of profit-making”*

We have seen how the capitalist tries to increase the rate of surplus-value. Now we raise the question why he has to be involved in such a restless manner in profit-making. Why can't he stop half-way or go slow? This can be attributed to the unlimited “greed” which is fostered by capitalism. But this greed should not be misunderstood in a moralistic manner. Individual capitalists don't need to be very greedy in the moral sense. Maybe they are even quite generous or detached. But as capitalists they have to go on accumulating capital. Otherwise they go bankrupt.

This pressure comes from the *competition* between the individual capitalists which is characteristic for capitalism. If a capitalist does not invest in new technology, if he does not expand production, others will move ahead and conquer the market and he will be left out in the cold. Therefore he cannot afford to take it easy. He cannot appropriate the profit for his own consumption only or spend it just for some unproductive purposes. He must take part of it and put it aside for re-investment. That part becomes new, additional capital. Thus he has to accumulate capital. This implies the trend towards the *concentration* capital in large-scale production. This concentration again becomes the basis for the *centralisation* of the ownership and control of capital



in the hands of a few.<sup>22</sup> The market is like the jungle with its law of survival of the fittest. The big ones eat the small ones. Under certain conditions small capitalists may survive in certain sectors of the economy. But they are permanently under the same pressure. The general tendency is towards the elimination of the smaller one, to the centralisation of capital. The big capitalists grow bigger and fewer.<sup>23</sup> In the early days of the automobile industry there were hundred or more firms in USA and England. Today their number has been reduced to a handful of gigantic companies like General Motors. In other industries where investment is less high centralisation may be less, but the tendency exists everywhere.

We now consider what effect the law of accumulation of capital has on labour.<sup>24</sup> Accumulation of capital means an increased demand for labour-power. This could lead to a rise in the price of labour. On a modest scale wages may rise for a while. But this does not change the basic position of the labourer, who is completely dependent on the capitalist. Capitalism does not only create demand for labour, it also creates unemployment through the process of mechanization. In this way it creates an “*industrial reserve army*” of unemployed whose existence makes it possible for the capitalist to keep the wages of the employed under control.

*“The action of the law of supply and demand of labour on this basis completes the despotism of capital”.<sup>25</sup> “The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore, also the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productiveness of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army... The more extensive, finally, the layers of the working class, and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism. This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation. Like all other laws it is modified in its working by many circumstances, the analysis of which does not concern us here”.<sup>26</sup>*

Basically the effect of accumulation of capital on labour is one of increasing misery. This holds even when the wages are rising. It is often said that this prediction of Marx had been proven untrue in the affluent capitalist societies of today, where workers may have a car or so. But for Marx misery is not only material poverty but basically human alienation, slavery. This is increasingly the lot of the labourer, “be his payment high or low”.

*“Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production*



transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour-process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour-process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life time into working time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital. But all methods for the production of surplus-value are at the same time methods of accumulation and every extension of accumulation becomes again a means for the development of those methods. It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse. The law establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation at the opposite pole...''<sup>27</sup>

There is another reason why the capitalist has to expand production unceasingly. In the process of accumulation of capital the proportion of constant capital increases and becomes greater in relation to variable capital. This is called the growth in the organic composition of capital. *Constant capital* is that part of capital which is spent on plant, machinery, tools, raw material, etc., i.e. that part which does not produce surplus-value. *Variable capital* is that part of capital which is spent on buying labour-power, i.e. the part which produces surplus-value. Since constant capital increases in the process of mechanization and the part of surplus-value producing variable capital becomes relatively less, Marx assumes a "tendency of the average rate of profit to decline". The more a capitalist expands the lower his rate of profit becomes. He can only make good for it by expanding the scale of production.<sup>28</sup>

But the ever increasing expansion of capitalist production leads inevitably to an economic crisis. That is the other law of capitalism which Marx establishes. Those crises are the result of the basic contradiction between capital and labour. In order to survive capital must accumulate and expand. For its expanding mass-production it must find masses of buyers. Those masses consist to a large extent of workers. They can only buy if they receive higher wages. But higher wages reduce the capitalists' rate of profit. Every individual capitalist, therefore, would like to keep his own workers poor, and to see the rest



of the workers rich enough to buy his products.

These capitalist crises are something new in world history. They are not crises of scarcity like all pre-capitalist crises. They are crises of overproduction, of plenty. The capitalists have produced too much. They cannot sell their products. They must reduce production. They lay off workers. The number of buyers fall further. Production is further reduced, etc.

*“In these crises there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity—the epidemic of overproduction. Society finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism: it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce... And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented”.*<sup>29</sup>

Historically this analysis of Marx was verified again and again, and most impressively in the great crisis of 1929. Afterwards capitalist societies accepted and applied measures as proposed by the economist Keynes which involved intervention of the state. Today the possibilities of these measures seem to have reached their limits.

#### *e. Monopoly capitalism and imperialism*

The dynamism of capitalism, the permanent pressure to accumulate capital, leads to a change in the character of capitalist economy. The era of free competition brought about a tremendous expansion of productive forces and of production on a mass scale. But this led simultaneously to the concentration and centralisation of capital, and thus to a new situation in which a decreasing number of big companies or groups of companies were able to conquer monopoly positions in the market. *Monopoly capitalism* developed. Through cartels, trusts, holdings and fusions, capitalists move to protect the rate of profit against the effects of free competition. Once the market is under monopoly control higher profits can be achieved by limiting production instead of increasing it, by holding back technological improvements instead of introducing them, by lowering



the quality of products instead of raising it.

Yet monopoly capitalists are never alone. They may have swallowed or crushed the smaller ones, but they have to compete with other giants. Actually the competition for markets and the control of resources becomes fiercer and fiercer. It involves national rivalries, the rush for colonies and finally wars on a world scale. Monopoly capitalism brings the era of modern imperialism with all its horrors.

Marx foresaw the rise of monopolies as the result of the concentration of capital. But monopoly capitalism became dominant only after his death. Several marxists have tried to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of this new phase of capitalism. The Austrian marxist Rudolf Hilferding published his study "Finance Capital. The latest phase of capitalist development" in 1910. The Polish-German marxist Rosa Luxemburg came out with her study "The Accumulation of Capital" in 1913. The Russian marxist N. Bukharin finished his "Imperialism and World Economy" in 1915. And Lenin completed his "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism" in 1916.

In his analysis of monopoly capitalism, Hilferding drew attention to the concentration and centralisation of the banking system and the fact that the modern bank acquired more and more control over industrial production. He called this capital controlled by banks and employed by industrialists "*finance capital*". He assumed that this finance capital increasingly regulated the whole economic system on the national level, while its pursuit of higher profits led to imperialist policies on the international level. He observed the militarization of modern capitalism in the competition for raw materials and export markets. Bukharin went further and concluded that monopoly capitalism inevitably had to lead to imperialist wars which in turn would pave the way for proletarian revolutions.<sup>30</sup>

Lenin made use both of Hilferding and Bukharin, though he differed on certain points with them. For example, he did not agree with Hilferding that monopolisation would eliminate all free competition within a national economy. In his own definition he formulates the following five *basic features of imperialism*:

"(1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this '*finance capital*', of a financial oligarchy; (3) the export of capital as distingui-



*shed from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves, and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed".*<sup>31</sup>

It is important to note that this characteristic of imperialism is concerned with the general structure of capitalism in its latest development. Understood in Lenin's way imperialism is not identical with colonialism. It presupposes that the territorial division of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed. But this is distinguished from "the division of the world among the international trusts" which "has begun".<sup>32</sup>

The relationship of imperialism and *colonialism* has become a matter of much debate among marxists in the present time in which colonies have gone, but giant international trusts, the "multis" are exercising imperialist control over large parts of the world.<sup>33</sup> In the period of free competition, between 1840 and 1860, bourgeois politicians in Britain had opposed colonial policy, calling colonies "millstones around our necks".<sup>34</sup> Of course, this they said after colonial plunder, slave trade, etc., had contributed in a decisive way to the accumulation of capital which made Britain the most advanced capitalist country. But once they had reached this advantage point trade would do and colonies were not considered to be necessary. But after 1860 and increasingly after 1880 a tremendous spurt in the conquest of colonies took place and within two decades the territorial division of the globe among the competing capitalist powers was more or less completed. This was a result of the fact that other rising capitalist powers started threatening the dominant position of Britain and British capital.

It has been argued that colonialism from an economic point of view has been much less profitable than anticipated. It brought super-profits for some capitalists, but not necessarily for capitalist countries as a whole. Statistics show that much more capital was invested in other capitalist countries and in dominions like Australia and Canada than in the African and Asian colonies. However, imperialism is more than a matter of balance-sheets and quick profits. It concerns the structures of the world economy, the establishment of control over resources and markets and economic mechanisms. In that respect colonialism played an essential role in the development of modern imperialism, as Harry Magdoff has pointed out. It brought about the restructuring of the colonized countries according to the needs of the metropolitan coun-



tries. Once this had been accomplished imperialism could survive the loss of colonial empires.<sup>35</sup> After a new international division of labour had been created in which the colonial countries were forced to produce the raw materials for the highly industrialised countries, imperialism could do without colonies. Other arrangements were sufficient to maintain the relationship of economic dependence: preferential trade agreements, currency blocs, the flexibility of multinationals, control through World Bank and International Monetary Fund, manipulation of the local elites, military assistance, and in the background the military presence of the USA all round the globe.

The present picture differs from what Lenin expected. The first World War ended with the collapse of the outdated empires of Russia and Austria and the German Empire, but not with the downfall of imperialist capitalism. Only in Russia the anti-imperialist revolution led by Lenin succeeded. Elsewhere capitalism recovered under changed conditions. It even survived the great crash of 1929, the devastating effects of the Second World War and the loss of colonial empires in its aftermath. It even entered into a phase of unprecedented growth in the fifties and sixties under the leadership of the USA as the dominant imperialist power. This happened in spite of the growing strength of the Soviet-Union and its allies, and in spite of successful anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Instead of devouring each other in further wars the big capitalist powers co-operated in political, military and economic alliances and institutions, such as NATO, EEC, World Bank and IMF. There was and is an unprecedented arms race and militarization of production and of society at large in capitalist countries, but this time it is directed against the socialist and the anti-imperialist liberation movements, as in Vietnam. Thus G. Lichtheim could suggest that Kautsky's idea of "ultra-imperialism", i.e. of a sort of global cartel of capitalist powers seemed to have come true rather than Lenin's forecast of deadly struggles between the imperialist powers.<sup>36</sup>

One reason for this co-operation between capitalist powers which simultaneously compete with each other is a growing "international class consciousness on the part of capital", due to the challenge of the socialist bloc and anti-imperialist struggles on the one hand and the process of internationalisation and interpenetration of capital on the other hand. The investments of US-capital in Europe and Japan and of European and Japanese capital in the USA, and the international character of a growing number of giant firms has helped to "forge an identity of interests between competing national capitals".<sup>37</sup> One may speculate whether or not the growing investments of multinational



companies in the Soviet bloc countries create a vested interest also there in the survival of capitalism. However that may be, at the same time growing tensions between the major centres of capitalist power—USA, EEC, Japan can be observed, while the Reagan administration tries to reassert the leading role of the USA by an unprecedented spurt in military spending and by aggressive trade policies.

The most striking feature of imperialism in the present phase is the ever more dominating role of giant *multinational corporations* which operate on a global level. Their power supersedes that of most national governments and goes uncontrolled. Its secret is the concentration of information, planning, and decision-making in a few key-cities in the hands of a few people at the top of the pyramidal structure, and the spreading of the workforce, the resources and the process of production all over the globe. At the bottom of the pyramid there are local workforces, happy to escape from unemployment, ready to work for a low wage, and unable to unite across the globe with other segments of the workforces employed by the same company. And if they yet try to assert their rights and demands, they are possibly confronted with the “shifting cultivation” techniques of international capital which leave one group of workers in one country for another “in a process resembling slash and burn agriculture, forcing the advanced group to lie fallow in unemployment for use later when their resistance has been weakened”.<sup>38</sup>

The concentration of capital in multinational banks and corporations fosters uneven development both on a global and on a national level. It contributes to the marginalization of underdeveloped countries and regions. And where it leads to the integration of some countries as manufacturing locations into their orbit, as in the case of Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, Brazil, etc., it is a matter of creating neo-colonial dependence.<sup>39</sup>

The burning question is how to fight this octopus, hitting not only at some tentacles here and there but at the centre of its strangling operations. Imperialism today with its tremendous potential for destruction has become more dangerous than ever. In order to fight it we need a proper understanding of its changing character, its weaknesses and its strength. Loose talk which blames imperialism for everything bad on earth does not help in this direction. We may learn from Lenin and other marxists of an earlier period that serious analysis is needed.

## **2. De-humanisation of labour**

### *a. Alienation*

The key to Marx' critique of capitalism is his theory of surplus-value



which explains how capital grows by consuming living labour. This theory is more than an academic explanation of how the capitalist economy works. The implications reach far beyond questions of political economy.

Because only labour-power produces surplus-value its exploitation is the basis of the capitalist system. But labour-power is not only an economic factor, as it appears in the calculations of the capitalists. Labour is not only "variable capital". Labour-power is provided by living human beings who have their own needs and aspirations. Capitalism has separated labour and the satisfaction of human aspirations. Labour-power is treated as a commodity in exchange for which workers may satisfy some of their most immediate needs. But for Marx labour itself is the most essential characteristic of human life.

Without it humankind not only cannot survive, it even cannot become human. Labour distinguishes human life from all other forms of life. Human labour is *purposive*. In labour

*"man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces... in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants".*

Human labour is *imaginative*, it is conscious and not instinctual.

*"We pre-suppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises its structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement."*<sup>40</sup>

Human labour is *liberating* for the subject. This Marx states in a polemic against Adam Smith who treats labour as a curse and who can't imagine that a healthy individual needs a normal portion of work.

*"Smith has no inkling whatever that this overcoming of obstacles is in itself a liberating activity — and that, further, the external aims become stripped of the semblance of merely external natural urgencies, and become posited as aims which the individual himself posits — hence as self-realization, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom"*<sup>41</sup>



Human labour is *social*. It is self-realisation through the production for others and with others. Isolated individuals cannot survive on their own. Productive interaction with nature requires co-operation, division of labour and exchange. In the process the human species realises itself. One might even say that the meaning of labour lies in this self-realisation of the human species.

As a social process human labour creates society in its various forms. But as such it is also conditioned by society in its different forms. In the course of history the development of class societies threatens the human quality of labour. The climax of this threat is reached in capitalism, the main target of Marx' critique. The capitalist mode of production has increased the productivity of human labour on a gigantic scale. But it has done so at the cost of the producers. They are forced to sell their labour-powers to the capitalist. The meaning of all his productive activity lies for the worker no longer in the activity itself but in the wage which he receives at the end of a day or a week. Life is being active, creative, productive. But the activity of the worker does not belong to himself, but to the capitalist. His life starts only when the work is over. He works only for getting the means of life, not for life itself. That is what Marx calls *alienation*.

In his early "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" (1844), Marx analyses the various aspects of this alienation. Firstly, the worker is alienated from the product of his labour. The product in which he expresses and realises himself does not belong to him. It is appropriated by the capitalists and sold on the market. With the realisation of surplus-value capital grows, and with capital the alien power which controls and dominates the life of the worker. The more he works, the better he produces, the stronger becomes this alien power of capital. Secondly, under the capitalist conditions the worker is alienated from the act of producing itself. The most human activity does no longer belong to the producer himself. It has become a commodity sold and bought on the market, the commodity of labour power. The buyer of this commodity, the capitalist, determines what the worker does and how he has to do it. Thirdly, capitalist production alienates the worker from his being a member of the human species and from his humanity as being a fellow being with other human beings. His social activity, production, turns into a means for his individual existence, for earning a wage. This implies his alienation from other human beings with whom he competes for scarce jobs.<sup>42</sup>

It has been suggested by some doctrinaire marxists that Marx in his later scientific work abandoned his concern about "alienation". It is



true that his approach to the problem changes, and the philosophical concept of alienation moves into the background. There it still can be found, as "Grundrisse" proves. But the same concern is very much present in a new way in the most down-to-earth chapters of "Capital". Marx documents in detail how alienation takes place, both in the extraction of absolute surplus-value and in the extraction of relative surplus-value, both in the lengthening of the working day and in the technical division of labour and mechanisation pushed forward by capital.

Marx included chapter X of Vol.I, on the Working-Day, at a time when the agitation of the working class for the limitation of the working-day had become powerful. He saw this struggle as a crucial part of the "protracted Civil War" between the capitalist class and the working class and the demand for a shortening of the working-day as much more revolutionary than the demand for higher wages. This struggle over time goes beyond economic advantages. Life itself is at stake. "Time is the room of human development", as Marx puts it in "Wages, Price and Profit"

*"A man who has no free time to dispose of, whose whole life time, apart from the more physical interruptions by sleep, meals and so forth, is absorbed by his labour for the capitalist, is less than a beast of burden. He is a mere machine for producing Foreign Wealth, broken in body and brutalised in mind."*<sup>43</sup>

And in the chapter on the working-day he documents in horrifying detail how capital in its thirst for surplus-value extends the working-day to unbearable limits, deprives the workers of health and actually shortens their life.

*'Capital cares nothing for the length of life of labour-power. All that concerns it is simply and solely the maximum of labour-power that can be rendered fluent in a working-day. It attains this end by shortening the extent of the labourer's life, as a greedy farmer snatches increased produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility'.*<sup>44</sup>

But it is not only the length of life, it is its human quality which is at stake. The time which the worker is at the disposal of capital is his life-time, the time in which as a human being he has to develop his capacities and to fulfil his needs. Capital is only interested in labour-time devoted to its self-valorization.

*"Time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilling of social functions and for social intercourse, for the free-play of his*



*bodily and mental activity, even the rest time of Sunday (and that in a country of Sabbatarians) — moonshine.*"<sup>45</sup>

Being forced to sell his labour-power the worker has no time to be and to develop himself as a human being.

### *b. Division of labour*

The other aspect of alienation is the de-humanisation of labour itself. This happens in the course of the new division of labour promoted by capitalism.

Division of labour is not invented by capitalism. It developed at an early stage of history. It is at the same time the source of material and cultural progress and of human alienation. It increases the productivity of human labour, it makes it possible to produce a surplus, which again is the necessary condition for the development of culture, art, politics, and also religion. The existence of philosophers and artists, priests, and kings is possible only on the fundament of the division of labour. But the progressive development of culture takes place at the cost of the direct producers. Their horizon narrows down, they get specialized and lose their relation to the process as a whole. The same philosophers, priests and kings monopolize the control over society as a whole. They enjoy the freedom which is based on the understanding and control of the total process. The others lose this freedom. They are no longer responsible members of a tribe, but isolated villagers in a huge empire, or slaves without rights, or serfs in a feudal set-up. Their life gets more and more dominated by alien forces beyond their control. In this way all division of labour leads to alienation.

But there is a fundamental difference between the division of labour in pre-capitalist societies and the new forms developed by capitalism. In pre-capitalist societies we can speak of a *social division of labour*. Various social and economic activities are divided between various crafts. It implies the division between town and country, and between various crafts. It specializes the social production so that different crafts produce different commodities. But the capitalist mode of production while intensifying the social division of labour introduces also a *technical division of labour* which divides one particular craft, the production of one particular commodity into as many detail functions as possible and profitable. The weavers, carpenters, peasants of old produced different commodities. The industrial workers in capitalism have become detail labourers who individually no longer produce commodities but only collectively as part of a whole assembly of machines and workers.



This process started with the co-operation of individual artisans in one workshop under the control of an owner-capitalist. They still worked as before, producing the whole commodity. But it was the beginning of direction, control, management.<sup>46</sup> In the next stage of manufacture the technical division of labour begins. Each worker is assigned to a few operations on which he specializes. Out of this a hierarchy of labour-powers develops from most skilled to unskilled.<sup>47</sup> Management becomes more important. Apart from control it assumes more and more the function of planning and conceptualisation of the work. The workers have to execute the tasks assigned to them. But as long as they are skilled they have still a certain freedom and control within the limits of their function.

Thus in this period — 16th to 18th century — three fundamental changes in the character of productive work take place. Firstly capitalist management imposes strict discipline of labour through means of despotic control. The artisans of old had the freedom to choose their own rhythm and style of work. Once forced into workshop and manufacture they have to subordinate themselves to the will of the managing capitalist. To manage originally meant to train a horse in his paces, to cause him to do the exercises of the manage. "And control is indeed the central concept of all management."<sup>48</sup> Secondly, under capitalist management also that fundamental division develops which separates the conceptualisation and execution of the work. This is given with the development of the detail worker who is no longer related to the production of the whole. Thirdly, the capitalist drive for profit creates for the first time a large scale unskilled labour, i.e. workers who for their lifetime are condemned to do cheap unskilled labour. In the old days of the artisans all shared in the unskilled labour, or if the apprentices got the main share of it they had the perspective that this would change once they had ended their apprenticeship.

In the social division of labour the producers may have been alienated from the whole of society, but there are still a possibility of meaningful self-realisation in the work. In the technical division of labour alienation involves the process of labour itself. The social division of labour subdivides society, the technical division of labour subdivides humans.

*Modern Industry* — starting in the last quarter of the 18th century — brings the further development of some of these trends and fundamental changes in other respects. Further development we find in the drive for technical division of labour into the most minute details. Braverman quotes a description of the first assembly line in American



industry which was a meatpacker conveyor:

*"It would be difficult to find another industry where division of labour has been so ingeniously and microscopically worked out. The animal has been surveyed and laid off like a map; and the men have been classified in over thirty specialities and twenty rates of pay, from 16 cents to 50 cents an hour. The 50 cents man is restricted to using the knife on the most delicate parts of the hide (floorman) or to using the axe in splitting the backbone (splitter); and wherever a less skilled man can be slipped in at 18 cents, 18/20 cents, 21 cents, 22/3 cents, 25 cents and so on, a place is made for him, and an occupation mapped out. In working on the hide alone there are nine positions, at eight different rates of pay".<sup>49</sup>*

In the "mythology of capitalism" as Braverman calls it, this is presented as an effort "to preserve scarce skills" and to use them efficiently for the advantage of society. But he shows that it is capitalism which first creates this scarcity of skills:

*"Every step in the labour process is divorced, so far as possible, from special knowledge and training and reduced to simple labour. Meanwhile, the relatively few persons for whom special knowledge and training are reserved are freed so far as possible from the obligations of simple labour. In this way a structure is given to all labour processes that at its extremes polarizes those whose time is infinitely valuable and those whose time is worth almost nothing. This might even be called the general law of the capitalist division of labour."<sup>50</sup>*

Marx analyses the impact of machinery and modern industry on labour in Ch. XV of Capital I. To him technology is not something neutral as for many Marxists later. He shows how the development of technology under capitalism is geared towards the maximum production of surplus-value and how it transforms the worker — on the basis of the capitalist division of labour — into a living appendage of a lifeless mechanism.

*"In handicrafts and manufacture, the workman makes use of a tool, in the factory, the machine makes use of him. There the movements of the instrument of labour proceed from him, here it is the movements of the machine that he must follow. In manufacture the workmen are parts of a living mechanism. In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism independent of the workman, who becomes its mere living appendage".<sup>51</sup>*

The fundamental characteristic of machinery is that it removes the tool from the hands of the worker and fits it into a mechanism which is moved independently from the worker. This opens new avenues for exploitation.



Instead of being used for shortening the working-time, "it becomes in the hands of capital the most powerful means ... for lengthening the working-day beyond all bounds set by human nature."<sup>52</sup> It makes child labour possible. It creates the means of intensifying the labour by speeding up the machines. And above all it leads to the further degradation of the worker by completing the "separation of the intellectual powers of production from the manual labour, and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labour".<sup>53</sup> Thus machinery becomes,

*"for most of the working population, the source not of freedom, but of enslavement, not of mastery, but of helplessness, and not of the broadening of the horizon of labour but of the confinement of the worker within a blind round of servile duties in which the machine appears as the embodiment of science and the worker as little or nothing."*<sup>54</sup>

Technically speaking it is the transformation of labour from processes based on skill to processes based upon science. That this process led to the degradation of the workers is not an unavoidable result of the development of science and technology, but it is the consequence of the subordination of science and technology to the purpose of capital. It is in the same period that capital proceeds with the help of "scientific-management" to re-organise the labour process based on the following principles of Taylor: 1) The dissociation of the labour process from the skill of the workers: "The Managers assume ... the burden of gathering together all the traditional knowledge which in the past has been possessed by the workmen and then of classifying, tabulating, and reducing this knowledge to rules, laws, and formulae..." 2) The separation of conception from execution: "All possible brain work should be removed from the shop and centered in the planning or laying-out department." 3) The use of this monopoly over knowledge to control each step of the labour process and its mode of execution: "The work of every workman is fully planned out by the management... and each man receives in most cases complete written instructions, describing in detail the task which he is to accomplish, as well as the means to be used in doing the work."<sup>55</sup>

This separation of hand and brain was not necessary. Contemporaries of Taylor asked: why not scientific workmanship rather than scientific management? Why not up-grading the workers to the scientific level rather than degrading them to animal-like activities? The only answer had to be, not that it was impossible, but that it was unprofitable.

Instead of such upgrading capitalism took to industrial psychology and behavioural sciences with their study of "human relations" to find ways to make the workers accept their downgrading. In the first



systematic outline of industrial psychology, Munsterberg declares as his aim to place the psychological experiment "at the service of commerce and industry" (1912).

*"We ask how we can find the men whose mental qualities make them best fitted for the work which they have to do; secondly, under what psychological conditions we can secure the greatest and most satisfactory output of work from every man; and finally, how we can produce most completely the influence on human minds which are desired in the interests of business."*<sup>56</sup>

Braverman describes how meanwhile the clerical workers have been subjected to the same process of degradation in the 20th century as the industrial workers in the 19th. Originally the office was the site of mental labour with a monopoly over conception, planning, etc., but soon the "functions of thought and planning became concentrated in an ever smaller group within the office, and for the mass of those employed there the office became just as much site of manual labour as the factory floor."<sup>57</sup> This has been achieved by the same processes of technical division of labour and by mechanisation. As a result the clerks lost their middle class position and show no more any basic differences with blue-collar workers. In pay they have come down from about double pay to an average below that for industries workers, at least in the U.S.

Marx repeatedly characterised the alienation of the worker who faces the gigantic machinery of modern, capitalist, industry, and who experiences his powerlessness in front of it, as the *rule of dead labour over living labour*. The worker does not see it like this. He sees the machinery as representing the wealth, the capital of the capitalist and the superior knowledge of the scientists, compared to which he himself is poor and ignorant and doomed to remain so.

*"By means of its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour confronts the labourer during the labour process, in the shape of capital, of dead labour, that dominates and pumps dry, living labour-power. The separation of the intellectual powers of production from the manual labour, and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labour, is... finally completed by modern industry erected on the foundation of machinery. The special skill of each individual machine-operator, who has now been deprived of all significance vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity in the face of the science, the gigantic physical forces, and the mass of social labour embodied in the system of machinery, which, together with those three forces, constitutes the power of the*



'master' " 58

What confronts him is in fact "objectified labour", the result of labour in the past. In pre-capitalist society the producer was not confronted with means of production dominating and threatening him as a alien power. He knew that the plough or the loom was the product of labour and he made use of it in his own purpose. But in the factory of the capitalist the situation is different. He still uses the tools, but at the same time he is used by them, not because they are no longer tools of production but because he is a wage-labourer meant to serve the valorization of capital and not his own purpose. It is in this valorization process of capital that the means of production manifest themselves as an alien power over the workers, "as the rule of past, dead labour over the living." 59

*"Hence the rule of the capitalist over the worker is the rule of things over man, of dead labour over the living, of the product over the producer... What we are confronted by here is the **alienation** of man from his own labour. To that extent the worker stands on a higher plane than the capitalist from the outset, since the latter has his roots in the process of alienation and finds absolute satisfaction in it whereas right from the start the worker is a victim who confronts it as a rebel and experiences it as a process of enslavement."* 60

### c. Work in socialism

Marx expected that the problems discussed above could be solved once the private ownership of the means of production would have been abolished, and the producers, freely associated, would have taken control of the production process, planning it in a rational way. In his early days, he projected not only the end of dehumanising conditions of the labour process in the factory with its technical division of labour, but even the end of the social division of labour.

*"As soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd*



or critic.”<sup>61</sup>

Many have ridiculed this statement as an utopian dream. And it certainly does not belong to the practical guidelines which direct the policies of communist parties in power today. Yet it expresses — in an utopian form — a basic aspiration which Marx expected communist society to fulfill. In that society human beings will be able to develop their full potential, and the organisation of society and of the labour process will no longer cripple them.

This he approaches in a different way in “Capital” when he points out that the revolutionary technical changes in Modern Industry also revolutionise “the division of labour within the society”, launching masses of capital and of work-people from one branch of production to another. Thus Modern Industry by its very nature “necessitates variation of labour, fluency of function, universal mobility of the labourer.”<sup>62</sup>

*“Modern Industry, indeed, compels society, under penalty of death, to replace the detail-worker of today, crippled by life-long repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to the mere fragment of a man, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labours, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the different social functions he performs are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers”.*<sup>63</sup>

Here and in “Grundrisse” Marx expects that further scientific developments together with the scientific education of the producers will make this possible.

Elsewhere, however, Marx has emphasized that the creativity of labour in the sphere of material production will remain restricted and cannot be expected to become the full realisation of freedom. Under all possible modes of production, also in the future society, man has to wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants.

*“In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production... Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of nature and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of their human nature”.*<sup>64</sup>

That is where most marxist thinking over socialism and communism



stops, certainly in the socialist countries. It is indeed important enough and worth to be pursued, as "free association" and "common control" and conditions "worthy of human nature" are not automatically forthcoming as soon as the means of production are nationalised. But it is not all. As Marx puts it, all that, even in its most favourable form, remains none the less still "a realm of necessity".

*"Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic pre-requisite."*<sup>65</sup>

Apparently Marx expected much from free time as time "for the complete development of the individual", including artistic, scientific and intellectual activities.

We may discuss the problems thrown up by Marx' projection of the future in two steps: 1) In how far are present-day socialist societies on the way to overcome the dehumanisation of labour created by capitalism and 2) how can we conceive the relationship of labour in production and creative activity in the "realm of freedom"?

(1) Whatever the expectations of Marx there are only few indications that present-day socialist societies are moving towards a solution of the basic problems of alienation of labour. The private ownership of the means of production has been abolished. Planning has been introduced. As a consequence workers are no longer so much harassed in the factories, threatened with the stick of dismissal and unemployment. They are enjoying security of work, of health care and education, and several other social benefits. These are important achievements, no doubt. But other things are much the same as in capitalist society, especially in the organisation of the labour process. The technical division of labour is still there, the separation of brain and hand continues and the despotic control of management also seems to have survived, be it that capitalists have been replaced by bureaucrats. What is most important, wage labour is still there, even piece-rate wages can be found. <sup>66</sup> In short, the basic causes of alienation, division of labour and wage-labour are still existing in socialist countries.

Historically this is quite understandable. The first successful proletarian revolution took place in backward Russia. The main economic task was to quickly develop the economy, to increase productivity, as a pre-condition for everything else. One took it from Marx that the historical mission of capitalism had been to develop the



productive forces, and thus to create the material basis of high productivity for the construction of socialism and communism. The implication was thought to be that the difference with capitalism was located only in the sphere of distribution, not in the sphere of production, of technology, science and the organisation of the labour-process. Thus Lenin and others saw the large-scale capitalist factory as the model of industrialisation in socialism. Till today this high, and almost uncritical respect for capitalist technology and organisation is wide-spread among marxists, both inside and outside socialist countries.

Fortunately, however, the critical insight is growing that *capitalist technology and capitalist forms of organisation are not neutral*. Its disastrous effects on nature and human beings have become visible and marxists in socialist and capitalist countries have started reflecting upon it. Looking back they find that Marx himself has been much more critical in his analysis of the capitalist organisation of the labour process than his followers. It is true he finds in the automatised factory "a tendency to equalise and reduce to one and the same level every kind of work" and thus a possibility to get away from the "hierarchy of specialised workers" and from a permanent fixed technical division of labour which characterized manufacture.<sup>67</sup> According to Marx the technical division of labour, the "barrack discipline" as well as the autocratic power of the capitalist over the workers do not arise from technical necessity, but are imposed by the capitalist drive for surplus-value. It is the "capitalist caricature of that social regulation of the labour-process which becomes necessary in co-operation on a great scale and in the employment in common, of instruments of labour and especially of machinery."<sup>68</sup>

In socialist practice, however, it turns out not to be so easy to overcome this capitalist caricature, and to replace army-like hierarchy and discipline by a truly "social regulation of the labour process" in which the producers are no longer blindly obeying soldiers but associate producers who together keep the labour process under common rational control, as stipulated in the above quotation from Capital III. Rudolf Bahro in his critical marxist analysis of socialist society has shown that the main problem is that of access to, and control over *information*. The socialist managers and bureaucrats are not owners of the means of production. Their power over the workers rests not upon ownership. It is political power which derives its strength largely from the control over information. Legally the worker is as much or as little "owner" of the factory as the top-manager but in



terms of decision-making he is powerless and excluded from meaningful participation because he is completely dependent on the information given to him. On that basis he has no other option than to confirm and fulfill the plans already made.<sup>69</sup>

Socialist society cannot be organised in such a way that one goes hunting in the morning and rearing cattle in the evening, that one does some engineering today and some surgery tomorrow. But it should create more and more scope for the "fully developed individual" to come into being who can perform "different social functions" as "alternate modes of activity" (Marx). To this belongs certainly the social function of participation in planning and decision-making. This requires a) a high level of education — on this account socialist societies are making significant progress — and b) democratic structures including access to information, both in society as a whole and in the places of work. Formally, many structures have been created, endless meetings take place, but the pre-requisite of free access to full information is lacking.

For democratic participation to become real also the *faith in "bigness"* needs to be challenged. "Big is beautiful" may be true for the few at the top. For the many at the bottom it makes them feel small and powerless, dominated by forces beyond their control, unless the huge collective structures are formed in such a way that real democracy is possible. If socialism means that people come into their own, that the producers start bringing things under common control, then the scale of management and planning and decision-making has to be such that small people can grow into responsible people. Many marxists are laughing about romantic ideas of "small is beautiful", but it makes a difference whether this is confronted with the slogan "big is beautiful" or "big is socialist", or with the observation that "big" cannot always be avoided and with the awareness that ways have to be found to cope with that. The fact that Gandhi and others have given an illusionary twist to their critique of capitalism in their wish to return to the small-scale world which irrevocably belongs to the past, does not mean that all their insights are reactionary and ridiculous. It would not be for the first time that the oppressed have imbibed certain values of their oppressors. It is quite natural that the working class has absorbed some of the standards of their exploiters. That may explain why many marxists are still admiring and reproducing the "bigness" of capitalism in spite of the despotism which goes with it, while other critics have seen through the de-humanizing effects not only of private ownership of the means of production, but also of the gigantism of



their centralisation.

Once the level of education has been raised, information has become freely accessible and the scale of organisation has been reduced and decentralisation introduced wherever possible, the regulation of the labour process may really become much more human and satisfying.

(2) Whatever the improvements possible in the labour-process itself the full development of people's creative potential will not be possible there. Too many constraints imposed by the necessity of certain types of dull and dirty labour and by the requirements of large-scale organisation will stand in the way. That is what Marx pointed at with his distinction of the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom.<sup>70</sup>

This distinction is not the same as that between "work" and "leisure". Experience shows that people who are subjected to drudgery in their daily work are seldom able to become creative in their free time. The probability is high that they will be passive consumers of the products offered by the leisure industry. This is true also for the socialist countries as the wide-spread problem of alcoholism dramatically underlines. That is why radical changes in the labour-process are crucial for what happens beyond it.

That realm of freedom itself, however, is not a realm of "labour" as work required by society but of "*free activity*" as that what people do according to their own plans to satisfy their personal needs and aspirations. For a long time the trend in socialist countries has been to expect from their citizens that they find the fulfillment of individual aspirations in the work for society as a whole. A good communist — and following his example a good citizen — is somebody who has no aspirations apart from the aspirations of the Party and who has no private plans apart from the goals set by the Five Years Plan. He may have to do dull work in an office or hard labour in a factory but he knows that it is for the good of all and therefore accepts the task assigned to him as his own. He is doing some detail work in a huge plant or bureaucratic set-up and yet he does not suffer from alienation under this division of labour because he has internally accepted, he has internalised his role. He even will be most willing to be available for the fulfillment of public duties in his spare time.

At a closer look this turns out to be a rather idealistic solution of the problem of alienation. The material basis has not changed as far as division of labour and wage-labour are concerned. The conditions that cause alienation are still there. But the heroic communist over-



comes this through a tremendous moral effort. He will not dream of anything else while on duty, he will sacrifice personal relations and aspirations that are supposed to stand in the way of the larger Goal. It reminds of the asceticism of monks. There are people who respond to such a moral challenge, who are able to commit their lives completely to the common good. But they are a minority. And it is an illusion to think that it would be possible to turn all humankind into such moral heroes. The moral exhortations which characterise public life in socialist countries go unheeded to a large extent.

People try to escape as much as possible into some private corner where they can pursue their personal priorities. It is one of the secrets of the relative stability of capitalist societies that they have allowed and even encouraged people to do so. Workers with a small allotment for gardening or a second hand car are less likely to become revolutionaries. Today socialist societies encourage the same privatisation in order to contain political protest, as it was very clear in Czechoslovakia after the upheaval of 1968.

Revolutionaries deplore such escapism into private life and consider it to be the typical sin of petty-bourgeois mentality. But their idealism does not offer a solution. They overlook that the strategies of privatisation and consumerism can be so successful only because they respond — in a distorted and alienating way — to real and authentic human needs. There are essential dimensions of human life which require a personal sphere and personal expression. The point is not to deny or ignore these crucial aspects of life but to create the space in which they can be honoured in a free and creative way which directly and indirectly will benefit the whole of society. Impatient and totally committed revolutionaries may learn from Marx the materialist to distinguish instead of identifying the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. The perspective of Marx is that the realm of necessity should be reduced through the shortening of the working-day and made to serve as basis for the expansion of the realm of the free development of human energy as an end in itself. We remember the younger Marx speaking of the activity of body and mind. We may think of art and play, of production for personal use, of friendship and caring for people who need help, of intellectual inquiry.

Andre Gorz has worked this out as the distinction between the sphere of heteronomy where one has to submit to norms and necessities of collective production and organisation, and the sphere of autonomy where one is free to choose what to do and how to do it. This interpretation of Marx deserves careful consideration. It avoids



the romantic utopian illusion that all alienation can be overcome in the society of the future. It avoids at the same time the equally romantic escapism of drop-outs who withdraw from society at large into small marginal groups — to discover that even there the necessities of life cause alienation. This approach recognises both the need for central planning and regulation (the realm of necessity) and the need for personal autonomy in the sphere of free activity. And it assumes rightly that people who find full scope in free activity and thus become more skilful, responsible and creative persons will be more able to take indeed common control of the collective life of society. The construction of socialism needs such personalities.

The question may be posed whether all this is not irrelevant in the Indian situation where the masses have to struggle for survival, for food or for jobs, and against ruthless exploitation. It is true that the most urgent task is the critical analysis of the various forms of exploitation of labour. For this “Capital” is very illuminating, as it helps us to distinguish the various forms of extracting surplus-value which co-exists in India today. We find both absolute and relative surplus-value, formal and real subsumption of labour under capital. It helps us also to analyse what is happening to the producers in the process of the destruction of traditional skills and in the creation of unskilled cheap labour. In addition we have to study the effect of the combination of traditional (caste-based) and modern separation of brain and hand which may reinforce each other.

However the working class movement cannot stop at this. It has to reflect already now what solutions it has to offer later. It has to evaluate the experience made in the various socialist countries especially in the Soviet-Union and China. It may have to develop much more social and technical imagination with regard to the problem of mass unemployment. It cannot possibly be satisfied with the present situation in which unemployed graduates are happy to move dusty files in a government job. It cannot leave the thinking about alternative technology and alternative forms of labour to those who try to realise this within capitalist society, if it wants to convince others that socialism is the only alternative.

### **3. Fetishism of commodities**

#### *a. Abstract labour*

One basic characteristic of commodity production and thus of capitalism is that production is managed by separate units of producers and is not directly regulated by society. Nobody, no institution pres-



cribes what one workshop or farm or factory has to produce. There is no central plan which allocates production tasks. Yet there is a national economy, yet the producers produce for society as a whole. This unity, this social connection is created through the market. The market regulates production. Through exchange in the market the producers get to know which products are needed and which not. The market, exchange, turns the *private labour* of separate producers into social labour, labour for others, for society. That is the social function of exchange, of the market.

But at the same time and in the same process of exchange in which private labour is recognised and realised as social labour, in which it has proved its usefulness for others, it loses its concreteness. It receives its recognition namely only as "abstract labour", as "human labour in general". Marx considered this distinction of the two-fold character of labour, of *concrete labour* which is expressed in the use-value and of *abstract labour* which is expressed in the exchange-value of a commodity, as one of his major discoveries and as crucial: "all understanding of the facts depends upon this."<sup>71</sup>

There is a popular misunderstanding, shared by marxists like Kautsky, that abstract labour means expenditure of physiological energy as that which is common to the different forms of concrete labour. That is indeed how Marx puts it in his initial approach to the dual character of labour in Capital Ch. 1, 2, where he speaks of tailoring and weaving being both "a productive expenditure of human brains, nerves, and muscles", and in this sense being "human labour".<sup>72</sup> But Rubin has convincingly shown that this physiological interpretation clashes with Marx's approach as a whole. Physiological labour is certainly a presupposition of abstract labour, but abstract labour which creates value is basically a *social* concept.<sup>73</sup> This can be seen from the contrast with concrete, useful labour which is "a necessary condition, independent of all forms of society, for the existence of the human race".<sup>74</sup> Abstract labour, on the other hand, is related to a particular form of society, namely to a society based on commodity production. It is only under the conditions of commodity production that the labour of various producers is equalized as abstract labour, as human labour in general. It is only because of these particular relations of production, only because the market turns labour into social labour that labour is only recognised as impersonal, homogeneous, abstract labour.

Marx brings a comparison with medieval society in Europe. In that society the social relations of production were characterised by personal dependence, of serfs and lords, etc. Because of these



personal relations,

*“there is no necessity for labour and its products to assume a fantastic form different from their reality. They take the shape in the transactions of society, of services in kind and payments in kind. Here the particular and natural form of labour, and not, as in a society based on commodity production, its general abstract form is the immediate social form of labour.”*<sup>75</sup>

Thus it is clearly stated that labour in its general form as abstract labour is the social form which is characteristic of a society based on commodity production.

Here we reach the core of Marx's famous *labour theory of Value*. Its point is not merely that only labour creates value. That had been stated already by bourgeois economists before Marx. What Marx untangles is why labour in capitalist society is expressed in exchange-value, why social labour, production for others, has to be expressed in terms of money. The reason is that a commodity society has no other means to relate the different producers to each other. It can only regulate their relations through exchange on the market. And exchange of commodities is only possible by equalizing them as products of abstract labour. Abstract labour is the substance of value. This substance is expressed in the form of exchange-value and exchange-value is the social form which expresses the social relations of production among the producers. It is not a mysterious property of a product but a way in which society recognises and evaluates the labour embodied in it and thus regulates the distribution of tasks among the producers. Thus the form of value — practically we may think of money — is determined by abstract labour and reflects the social relations of production of commodity economy.

The second aspect of the theory of value is that it also provides a theoretical basis for determining the magnitude of value which is based on what is called socially necessary labour. Often this has been taken as an attempt to provide a practical measure for determining prices. Rubin has shown, however, that this is not Marx's intention. His aim is to provide a theory which explains how capitalism basically works. Value explains one of its basic features, namely how the separate, autonomous commodity producers are united. Marx refers to Aristotle, the philosopher of ancient Greece. He understood that exchange presupposes equality. But he could not discover labour as that what is equal in different commodities, because his society was based on the fundamental inequality of slave-labour. Since there was not yet a concept of human equality, there was no possibility to



discover the "secret of the expression of value" namely the equality and equivalence of all kinds of labour because and so far as they are human labour in general". This, Marx concludes, became possible only in a society where the commodity form is the universal form of the product of labour, hence "the dominant relation between man and man is that of owners of commodities."<sup>76</sup>

The great representatives of classical political economy, Adam Smith and Ricardo, on the other hand, were not able to explain why value had to turn into exchange-value, because it would imply the admission that this is not an eternal natural form of social production but a specific historic form which can be overcome.

*"The value-form of the product of labour is not only the most abstract but is also the most universal form taken by the product in bourgeois production, and stamps that production as a particular species of social production, and thereby gives it its special historical character."*<sup>77</sup>

#### b. Money

What counts on the market are commodities and not people, money and nothing more. People produce for others but they don't communicate with them as people. They perform social labour, but they don't have direct social relations with the other producers. They relate to them only through the market, through the exchange of commodities, through money. What connects people in a commodity society is the cash nexus only. The only value which is valid on the market is the "value" which can be exchanged. Marx has analysed this peculiar form of social relations which characterises capitalism as a process of *reification*, as a development in which "things" determine the social relations and thus dominate the life of society.

Of course, people meet in the market. But their private transactions of buying and selling don't create permanent connections. What matters are the things which they bring to the market, or the factors of production which they represent. The capitalist functions as a personification of capital, the landowner of land, the worker of labour-power. It does not count what persons they are, but only what they represent: capital, land, labour-power. Thus the reification of social relations, the fact that "value" or "capital" expresses the social relations, finds its correspondence in the *personification* of things, of capital, etc. This reification is reproduced day after day, it expands and deepens encompassing the whole of society, as the capitalist mode of production develops. This social reality, this social being determines



social consciousness in capitalist society.

Marx has characterised the outcome as “fetishism”, i.e. the primitive worship of things. In the first chapter of “Capital” I, he has a special section on the “Fetishism of commodities and the secret thereof”.<sup>78</sup> And he follows this up in his analysis of the role of money and capital, when he identifies the “riddle of the money fetish” with the “riddle of the commodity fetish”<sup>79</sup> and when he calls gold the “Holy Grail” or the “glittering incarnation” of the “innermost principle of life” of modern, i.e. capitalist society.<sup>80</sup>

One would expect, Marx says in the section on commodity fetishism, that the relation between people is a social relation and the relation between things a physical one. But in the world of commodities it is different. There the relation between things which are commodities is not a physical but a social relation. What count are not the physical properties of these things, but their social connection, i.e. their value. What happens is that “a definite social relation between men” assumes “the fantastic form of a relation between things”. Marx finds an analogy in the world of religions in the worship of things, which are supposed to be endowed with divine life.

*“In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings **endowed with life**, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore, inseparable from the production of commodities.”*<sup>81</sup>

At an early stage of commodity production this fetish-character is “still relatively easy to penetrate”. People still may realise the social relations hidden behind the commodities and expressed in their exchange. But once the monetary system has become dominant and once capital has established its sway people and even scientists are unable to look through it. The process of exchange has lost its transparency. The money form “conceals the social character of private labour and the social relations between the individual producers”.<sup>82</sup> The social origin of money is forgotten. Once gold or silver has been established as universal equivalent for the exchange of all other commodities, it becomes the “direct incarnation of all human labour”.<sup>83</sup>

Money expands its function and its power more and more. Though money is nothing but the value-form of commodities, it can change even things “such as conscience, honour, etc.” which in themselves



are not commodities into commodities as they are offered for sale by their holders.<sup>84</sup> The more commodity production develops the more crucial becomes the possession of money.

*"Along with the extension of circulation, increases the power of money, that absolutely social form of wealth ever ready for use. 'Gold is a wonderful thing! Whoever possesses it is lord of all he wants. By means of gold one can even get souls into paradise'. (Columbus in his letter from Jamaica, 1503). Since gold does not disclose what has been transformed into it, everything, commodity or not, is convertible into gold. Everything becomes saleable and buyable. The circulation becomes the great social retort into which everything is thrown to come out again as a gold-crystal".*<sup>85</sup>

In moving words Marx evokes the irresistible power of this "radical leveller". And once more he quotes a passage from Shakespeare "Timon of Athen" which we find already in his early writings and in "Grundrisse":

*"Gold, Yellow, glittering, precious gold!  
Thus much of this will make black white; foul, fair;  
Wrong, right; base, noble; old, young; coward, valiant..."*<sup>86</sup>

What makes this power all the more devastating is that it can become the private property of any individual.

*"Thus social power becomes the private power of private persons. The ancients therefore denounced money as subversive of the economic and moral order of things. Modern society ... greets gold as its Holy Grail, as the glittering incarnation of the very principle of its own life."*<sup>87</sup>

It is with regard to money that Marx once quotes the Bible not in an ironical manner — as he usually does — but in a serious way. After saying that money becomes money only when it is socially recognised as an universal equivalent, he quotes in Latin the Revelation to John, combining ch. 17, 13 with ch. 13, 17. It reads in translation:

*"These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast. And no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is the name of the beast or the number of its name."*<sup>88</sup>

This vision which originally characterised the totalitarianism of the Roman Empire now serves Marx to illuminate the all embracing power of money and market. Nobody can escape, all are marked. It forces the capitalists to go on accumulating capital, and the workers to spend their life-time in working for money.



Greed can be seen as the very principle of capitalism. But it would be a misunderstanding to take this critique of Marx in a moralistic manner. Marx's critique is historical critique. He shows how this greed is the result of the historical development of capitalism. The love of money and the mania for possessions was there before capitalism. But the typical unlimited greed for money which gives access to everything to general wealth, is a product of capitalist society.<sup>89</sup> As this is the case, Marx does not simply appeal to his readers to be less greedy, but rather to discover how history moves towards the dissolution of that capitalist form of society based on greed and to become part of the action which undermines the power of the beast.

Marx's reflections on the fetishism of the commodity, on the power of things over people, and on the rule of money over life, are a masterpiece of historical materialist analysis. They are based on a careful study of the key elements of economic life in capitalism, but they are not limited to the formulation of economic theory. They aim at exposing the very "principle of life" in capitalist society. They show how social-consciousness in such a society is determined by social being. They explain how money has become the master of the minds and hearts. This illuminating analysis is of the greatest relevance, more than ever, today.

Whatever may have changed in capitalist society, reification and fetishism have grown into gigantic proportions, with absurd and catastrophic consequences. We may look at the missiles of the military-industrial complex and the domes of the nuclear plants of the energy-multinationals, as the super-fetishes of modern society, as the deities which demand worship at the cost of the people and of the earth itself.

But we find fetishism everywhere in capitalist society which on the one hand deprives millions of people of the necessities of life and on the other hand creates the desire for unnecessary and even harmful things not only among the privileged few but on a mass base.

The fetishist character of *consumerism* can be seen most clearly in the highly developed capitalist countries, but through advertising its presence is felt in India also far beyond the circle of the affluent minority which has the money power to consume. One of its most irrational fetishes, the private car, devours not only irreplaceable fuel but many lives and yet attempts to cut down on its use meet with the double resistance of those who make profit on it and the consumers who are attached to it beyond reason. In West-Germany about 30,000 people die annually in road accidents and many more are made invalid for the rest of their life. Yet, a proposal to limit the maximum speed to 100 km. per hour, which would reduce the number of casualties by



half, was defeated with the argument that this would slow down economic growth. Indeed the turnover in the sale of cars, spare-parts, fuel and not to forget medical hardware would come down. Thus 15,000 lives are sacrificed to that big Fetish, the Gross National Product.

The independent marxist writer Pasolini from Italy has suggested that modern consumerism has established a more totalitarian control over the lives of people than fascism was ever able to achieve. Fascist power was based on repression. Consumerism has won control over the souls of people. It has destroyed their culture and their identity, it has made them to aspire to the universal and uniform standards of happiness, the glittering symbols of status, ordered hierarchically according to money power. The pious peasant has lost his religious counter-values which enabled him to resist the lure. The proletarian worker has lost the pride of his working-class culture and turns into a frustrated consumer who tries to live up to petty-bourgeois standards. All are made to bow to the dictates of advertising.

In India, we are in a phase of transition. Capitalist relations of production are already dominating the national economy. Pre-capitalist relations have not all together disappeared, and pre-capitalist values are still surviving in spite of the onslaught of capitalism. But we can see how all social relations are more and more reduced or subjected to the cash nexus. Sometimes this may be an advance over brutal repressive relations before, as in the case of bonded labourers who become free wage-labourers. In other cases it means the end of a minimum of protection in times of hardship on the basis of mutual obligations. It also may mean the commercialisation of pre-capitalist arrangements such as dowry. Instead of slowly disappearing dowry is spreading, promoted by the drive for the status-symbols of capitalist consumerism. In the process family and marriage relationships are brutalised. Brides are burnt for the sake of cash, fridges and video-sets. Capitalist fetishism demands human sacrifices as god Moloch did in ancient times. One wonders to what extent consumerism that dominates the life of the rich will be able to undermine the identity of the poor—cinema—even in a situation in which they are deprived of the basic necessities of life.

### *c. Destruction of nature*

One of the consequences of capitalist commodity production is that the living interaction between human beings and nature is getting blocked. In use-values the interaction takes place, they contain natural materials and serve specific human needs. But capitalist production is



primarily interested in exchange-value. And exchange-value has no natural content. It is measured in labour-time. It is counted in money. The whole ecological crisis of the present is the outcome of the single-minded, ruthless pursuit of exchange-value, of accumulation of capital. Clean air and clean water may be very much needed, but as long as they have no exchange-value capital will not mind polluting them. Only now, as there is money in ecological business, capitalists have joined the ranks of those who are worried about the environment, in order to sell technology for the clearance of air and water.

There are critics who accuse Marx of having supported the capitalist drive for the development of the productive forces and, therefore, also the ruthless exploitation of nature of which today we pluck the bitter fruits. Some present-day marxists seem to reinforce this critique as they are often found on the side of business in ecological confrontations. However, Marx distinguishes himself, also on this account, from some of his followers, by a clearer perception of the ecological problem involved in capitalist production. It is true that Marx believed in the progressive character of capitalism as far as its development of the productive forces is concerned. He welcomed the technological and scientific revolution brought about by capitalism and the tremendous increase in the productivity of human labour following it. He was convinced that this would lay the material foundations for a communist society without exploitation.<sup>90</sup> In this way Marx shared the enthusiasm for technological progress with many 19th century contemporaries. But one has to take into consideration that he was more aware of the in-built destructivity of capitalist progress than others. Possibly he did not focus so much on it because he did not expect another 100 years of dynamic capitalist development and assumed that the socialist revolution would bring a turn with a correction of the destructive tendencies.

Marx' sensitivity to the destructive character of capitalist production with regard to the relationship of human beings and nature is rooted in his materialism. It was the *idealist* philosophy of Descartes with its strict *separation of subject and object* which allowed a practice in which nature was made an object of science and technology and exploitation without restrictions. Nature was seen only from the point of view of its usefulness to human beings, ready to be exploited according to their wishes. That has been and still is the capitalist approach.

Marx as materialist sees the relationship of nature and the human species as one of interaction, as one of mutual interpenetration. We are part of nature and interact with it through labour, thus changing



both nature and ourselves. This is what one really could call the dialectic of nature, nature's self-movement, its self-mediation, namely through the labour of the human species which itself is part of nature.

In his early writings Marx projects the vision of a reconciliation of humankind and nature – who got estranged in the course of history – in communist society. This reconciliation will bring the humanization of nature and the naturalization of the human. In his later writings Marx emphasizes more the ongoing struggle between humankind and nature, which can be brought under control and transformed but not abolished.<sup>91</sup>

But in any case, Marx's materialist understanding of our relationship to nature implies that we have to respect nature in its own rights. Nature is the "*inorganic body of man*" which we can plunder only to our own harm. It needs to be respected and nurtured as human beings do with regard to their own bodies. Neither private owners nor whole societies or nations can consider themselves as owners of the earth, with whom they could do as they like.

*"They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like 'good family fathers', they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition."*<sup>92</sup>

Marx uses the powerful biological analogy of *metabolism* to characterize the interaction with nature. He may have taken it from Moleschott, the materialist thinker who focussed on the eternal circulation of matter, in an endless process of combination and division, assimilation and excretion.<sup>93</sup>

We encounter this concept in the analysis of the *labour process* in Capital I, ch. 7.1:

*"Labour is, first of all a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adopted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power."*<sup>94</sup>

Labour seen from this angle aims at the production of use-values:

*"It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements*



*of man. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction (Stoffwechsel) between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore... common to all forms of society in which human beings live.”<sup>95</sup>*

Labour is therefore not the only source of material wealth in the form of use-values. Marx quotes William Petty saying: “labour is the father of material wealth, the earth is its mother.”<sup>96</sup>

It is very much different with wealth in terms of exchange-value. There the earth does not count any more, but only labour-time and money. There the metabolism with nature is replaced by the “social metabolism” of the circulation process of commodities which ends when the buyer of a commodity consumes it as an use-value<sup>97</sup> and it returns into the interaction of human beings and nature.

In his analysis of the implications of large-scale industry in Ch. XV of “Capital” I, Marx has given some attention to the disturbing effect of large scale urbanisation on the “metabolic interaction between man and the earth”:

*“It prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; hence it hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil. Thus it destroys at the same time the physical health of the urban worker, and the intellectual life of the rural worker.”<sup>98</sup>*

Fetish-worshippers of modern technology in “green revolution” fashion may try to correct Marx by pointing at modern chemical fertilizers, but Marx the materialist turns this down with the following statement:

*“All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil, all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress towards ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility... Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth — the soil and the worker.”<sup>99</sup>*

However, Marx sees a possibility of a “higher synthesis, a union of agriculture and industry” on the basis of what capitalism has developed in this antagonistic way. What is needed is the “systematic restoration” of the metabolism which has been disturbed by capitalism “as a regulative law of social production, and in a form adequate to the full development of the human race.”<sup>100</sup>



In other words, Marx expects socialism to give high priority to what today is called "ecology". The restoration of an environment conducive to the metabolism of humankind and nature should be a "regulative law of social production". It is surprising that many marxists are rather slow in recognising the destructive character of capitalism in its relationship to nature. They leave it to Gandhians and other romantic groups to criticise capitalism from this angle. Historically this may be understandable, because the first marxist-led revolution took place in backward Russia. The Russian marxists were burdened with the task of modernising the Russian economy and quite naturally took developed capitalist production as the model of development. The Chinese revolutionaries were already cautioned, it seems, and attempted "to walk on two legs" and to work towards overcoming the antagonism of town and country whether compelled by circumstances or by the old socialist vision, or by both. In any case, today the restoration of a balanced interaction with nature is of utmost urgency. And marxist revolutionaries can no longer afford to prop up the destructive designs of capitalist inspired progress. In terms of social organisation they are the only ones who can offer the pre-conditions for a solution of the ecological crisis: common ownership of the means of production and planning. But it needs more. It needs a re-orientation towards use-values as the aim of production, away from the approach which evaluates the economy in terms of exchange-value or quantities, the famous statistics of steel and cement which enliven the socialist press. And it needs concrete thinking and working towards the "restoration" which Marx demanded.

#### **4. Denial of Human needs**

##### *a. The concept*

It has become clear already that Marx in his critique of capitalism is not dealing with economics only. In fact, it is capitalist theory which separates economics from the other aspects of social life, claiming that nobody and nothing should interfere with the laws of the market. And it is the thrust of Marx's theory to overcome this separation, to build up a dialectical understanding of the whole of society. This thrust makes itself felt throughout in his discussion of economic theory. One of the basic categories which link Marx' critique of capitalism with a more fundamental frame of reference than economic theory in itself can offer is the concept of human needs which he frequently uses. A commodity can realise its exchange-value only if it has a use-value, i.e. can satisfy a specific human need. This concept of need presupposes or implies a theory of *what is human* which directly or indirectly plays



even a normative role in the evaluation of capitalism and in the projection of socialism.

Marx' historical materialist approach implies assumptions regarding the specific characteristics of human beings. In this the concept of "needs" plays a crucial role, because it has both a material and a historical dimension. It characterises human beings as needy beings, as natural beings who need nature and as social beings who need fellow human beings for their survival. But the content of their material and social needs changes in the course of history, or rather these needs develop historically. Human nature and human needs are changing in history.

In an interesting note Marx blames the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham that he takes the English petty bourgeois as the "normal man". Trying to answer the question what is useful for "man", he generalises what is useful "to this queer normal man" and applies this yard-stick to "past, present and future". However, a proper approach would require that one first deals "with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch."<sup>101</sup> Many needs develop only in the course of history. And even basic natural needs which always have been there, such as the need for food or sleep, change their forms of satisfaction.

*"Hunger is hunger; but the hunger that is satisfied with cooked meat eaten with fork and knife is a different kind of hunger from the one that devours raw meat with the aid of hands, nails and teeth."*<sup>102</sup>

The Hungarian Marxist philosopher Agnes Heller who has studied the concept of needs in Marx's writings in connection with her work on a marxist anthropology suggests various possibilities of classifying human needs. We can distinguish (a) according to the objects needed between material and non-material needs; (b) with reference to human nature between physical needs and needs produced by society in the course of history; and (c) economically between necessary needs and luxury needs.<sup>103</sup> She points out that Marx speaks of the *wealth of needs* which characterises the human species. There is a rich variety of faculties and powers which strive to find satisfaction and realisation. This finds expression in productive activity, in the production of food and cloth and shelter to satisfy natural physical needs, but also in the production of art, of paintings and music, etc., to satisfy spiritual needs for beauty and communication. It finds expression in social activity, in the creation of forms of collective life which help to satisfy the highest need, the need for fellow human beings. It belongs to the very nature of a person to be such a passionate, outgoing being in need of the



world and of others to find human satisfaction and realisation, to become human.<sup>104</sup> And the whole world, culture and society, are the outcome, the objectivation of the needs, and passions and powers of the human species.

This understanding of human being as a wealth of needs seeking to find satisfaction serves Marx as a critical measure in his evaluation of capitalism.

#### *b. Human poverty in capitalism*

At a first look capitalism appears as the mode of production which has created an unprecedented material wealth. Wealth is the promise it holds out to the world, as expressed in the title of the classical work of Adam Smith "The Wealth of Nations". And Marx is the last to deny this claim. He recognises the gigantic growth of productive forces and the tremendous potential created by capitalism. At the same time Marx criticises that this wealth is based on exploitation. Its other side is the poverty of the exploited proletariat and of the plundered nations. There may be a "sophistication of needs and of the means of their satisfaction on the one side" but this:

*"produces a bestial barbarisation, a complete, crude, abstract simplicity of needs on the other... Even the need for fresh air ceases to be a need for the worker... Light, air, etc. — the simplest animal cleanliness — ceases to be a need for man. Filth, this stagnation and putrefaction of man — the **sewage** of civilization (speaking quite literally) — comes to be the **element of life** for him."*<sup>105</sup>

This critique of the slums in which the English workers were doomed to live in the 19th century is still valid today in many cities all over the world. We see the sophistication and excessive luxury of modern bungalows and flats on the one hand and the squalor in which those have to live who build the mansions of the rich. And political economy justifies it.

*"Political economy, this science of wealth, is... simultaneously the science of renunciation, of want, of saving and it actually reaches the point where it spares man the need of either fresh air or physical exercise. This science of marvellous industry is simultaneously the science of asceticism, and its true ideal is the **ascetic** but **extortionate** miser and the **ascetic** but **productive** slave."*<sup>106</sup>

But the critique of Marx goes further and deeper. He does not only say that the material wealth produced in capitalism is badly and unjustly distributed. He sees that this glittering material wealth is



“poor” in terms of human needs and aspirations. Even the rich are poor, humanly speaking, under capitalist conditions. The never ending drive for profit cultivates crude and artificial needs, and alienates true human needs. It pushes people to create new needs in others in order to seduce them to buy. It creates “inhuman, sophisticated, unnatural and imaginary appetites. Private property does not know how to change crude need into human need.”<sup>107</sup> This is so because it cultivates the need “to have” rather than “to be”, to compete rather than to co-operate, to dominate others rather than to share with them.

*“Each tries to establish over the other an **alien** power, so as thereby to find satisfaction of his own selfish need. The increase in the quantity of objects is therefore accompanied by an extension of the realm of the alien powers to which man is subjected, and every new product represents a new **potentiality** of mutual swindling and mutual plundering. Man becomes ever poorer as man, his need for **money** becomes ever greater if he wants to master the hostile power...”<sup>108</sup>*

Since money gives access to everything the point is to have rather than to be.

*“The less you eat, drink and buy books; the less you go to the theatre, the dance hall, the public house, the less you think, love, theorise, sing, paint, dance, etc., the more you **save** — the **greater** becomes your treasure which neither moths nor rust will devour — your **capital**. The less you **are**, the less you express your own life, the more you **have**, i.e. the greater is your alienated life, the greater is the store of your estranged being.”<sup>109</sup>*

In capitalism one can say, I am what I have. The properties of money are my properties. I may be ugly, bad and stupid, but money can buy me beauty, honour and brains. What matters is not what I am but what I have in my pocket. As Marx puts it later in “Grundrisse”:

*“The individual carries his social powers as well as his bond with society in his pocket.”<sup>110</sup>*

Marx’s critique of capitalism evaluating it in terms of human needs is devastating. It compels the workers to cope with a sub-human satisfaction of their natural needs. It makes the rich to cultivate crude needs for superfluous gadgets and glitter. It forces people to be selfish, to compete with others, to get power over others. It is by its very structure unable to cultivate human needs.



### c. The socialist alternative

The wealth of human needs requires an alternative type of society in order to find fulfilment. In this respect the young Marx takes socialism as a moral postulate.

*"We have seen what significance, given socialism, the wealth of human needs, acquires, and what significance, therefore, both a new mode of production and a new object of production obtain: a new manifestation of the forces of human nature and a new enrichment of human nature."*<sup>111</sup>

One might say that Marx in his later work speaks of socialism as the possible outcome of the historical process of developing contradictions in capitalism. But though he may no longer explicitly argue the case of socialism as a moral demand, as something which is needed for human development, he certainly continues to presuppose that only socialism can provide the framework for the wealth of human needs to find fulfilment, that socialism is not only the possible outcome of historical development, but also desirable for the sake of humankind. As Rosa Luxemburg later puts it, the alternative is socialism or barbarism.

The expectation is not only that socialism will do away with an unequal distribution and will create conditions for a proper satisfaction of the basic, physical needs, so that the workers are no longer living in utter deprivation. It is important enough, that people will no longer be dominated like animals by the necessity of finding food and shelter, etc. But more is needed. In socialism the whole system of needs will have to change in order to develop an alternative to capitalism which makes it possible to develop and satisfy the wealth of human needs. If capitalism cultivates crude needs among the rich, then socialism will have to cultivate human needs among all. If capitalism stimulates the urge to have ever more, much more than one can possibly consume, socialism will have to stimulate people to become human beings, to be creative and communicate, to find their identity in what they are rather than in what they have. If capitalism encourages individuals to compete, to become the first at the cost of others, socialism will have to encourage people to enjoy supplementing, completing each other, knowing that one is incomplete without the others. If capitalism is built on exploitation socialism will be built on co-operation. As the young Marx puts it:

*"It will be seen how in place of the **wealth** and **poverty** of political economy come the **rich human being** and the rich **human need**.*



The **rich** human being is simultaneously the human being **in need** of a totality of human manifestations of life — the man in whom his own realisation exists as an inner necessity, as **need**. Not only **wealth**, but likewise the **poverty** of man — under the assumption of socialism — receives in equal measure a **human** and therefore social significance. Poverty is the passive bond which causes the human being to experience the need of the greatest wealth — the **other** human being.”<sup>112</sup>

The alternative society is expected to overcome alienation and to enable people to satisfy their human needs even in production itself. Marx describes in his early “Notes on James Mill” how then productive activity will bring a double affirmation. It affirms the “individuality” of the producer who recognises himself in the object he has created like the artist does. And it affirms his social being, giving the satisfaction “that my work satisfied a human need” of somebody else. “I would have been affirmed in your thought as well as your love.” Thus “in my individual activity, I would have immediately confirmed and realised my true nature; my *human nature*, my *communal nature*”.<sup>113</sup>

The language may change but the substance of this expectation remains in modified form throughout Marx’s work. It is contained in the expectation that in the new society the wage-system will be abolished and thus the basis for the alienation of the producers in productive work. It is further contained in the assumption either that work itself will lose its dehumanising character, uniting again manual and intellectual activity and thus becoming itself a vital need, or that free time for human development will be plenty available. In the later case Marx can speak of “free time, the time one has at one’s disposal” as “the true wealth”, as it is the time for the complete development of the individual.<sup>114</sup>

Most strongly and consistently the value-assumption of the new society is contained in the usual characteristic of it as a “free association”. In it people will no longer compete and exploit, but co-operate and associate. Obviously Marx assumes that freedom and association are values which correspond to true human needs and aspirations.

#### d. The need for revolution

The question arises why socialism as it already exists in Eastern Europe has not yet realised the expectations set in it by Marx and does not seem to move in that direction. It has succeeded in providing for the natural and physical needs. It has done away with abject poverty



existing along with extreme material wealth. But it has turned out that the human needs of which Marx spoke do not automatically develop once the material foundations have been laid. It appears that the appetite for the glittering products of capitalism does not so easily give way to the more human aspirations for creativity and communication. Partly this seems to be the result of a conscious policy on the side of the planning and ruling bureaucrats and technocrats. They prefer a population which quietly watches television and spends its free time as passive consumers. Partly however, it also seems to be an underestimated urge for things such as private cars which forces planners against all reason to give in to this pressure at the cost of public transport, etc. This phenomenon shows that a political revolution is not enough, a cultural revolution is needed.

Agnes Heller has in this connection pointed at Marx's concept of the "radical needs" of the proletariat. In his early "Critique of Hegels Philosophy of Law", Marx argues that revolution is impossible unless it corresponds to the needs of the people. "Only a revolution of radical needs can be a radical revolution" bringing general human emancipation.<sup>115</sup> This requires a "class with radical chains", a class submitted to universal suffering. This class is the proletariat. It cannot satisfy its human needs within capitalism. To regain its humanness it has to go beyond the present society, it needs revolution. It is the task of radical theory to express this revolutionary need. It will do so if it treats "man as the highest value for man". In "German Ideology" Marx argues that the proletarian in order to satisfy his needs has to become a revolutionary. The fact that "individuals have needs" implies that they "have a vocation and task", namely to fulfill their needs. Whether he likes it or not, whether he knows it or not, this forces the proletarian to become a revolutionary.

*"The proletarian... who like every human being has the vocation of satisfying his needs and who is not in a position to satisfy even the needs that he has in common with all human beings, the proletarian whom the necessity to work a 14 hour day debases to the level of a beast of burden, whom competition degrades to a mere thing, an article of trade... this proletarian is, if only for these reasons, confronted with the task of revolutionising his conditions."*<sup>116</sup>

However, it needs a conscious effort to recognise and stimulate these radical needs. Practice shows that workers and trade union leaders sometimes tend to settle down for less, struggling only for improvement in the existing conditions, not for their transformation. In "Wages, Price and Profit" (1865), Marx speaks of the need to go

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beyond the demand for higher wages.

*“Instead of the conservative motto, ‘A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work!’ they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, ‘Abolition of the wages system!’”*<sup>117</sup>

Only that would bring the “final emancipation of the working class”.<sup>118</sup> This underlines that revolutionary work is more than struggle for power. It requires the articulation of radical needs, of the need for an alternative. This means also that it cannot appeal to the same motives and values which keep capitalist society going. Agnes Heller has pointed out that Marx seldom appeals to *class-interests* in a narrow sense. He appeals to radical human needs. “Interest” is a value of bourgeois society. Higher wages is an interest of the working class. Capitalist society — reluctantly — has more or less accepted that the working class through its organisations pursues this interest by collective bargaining, etc. When the proletariat aims at overthrowing capitalism, it goes far beyond such interests, it responds to radical human needs, to the need for human emancipation.

This has important implications for people’s mobilisation in a pre-revolutionary situation. It is tempting for any organiser to get a quick response by appealing to the envy of the exploited, harping on the wealth of the exploiters and promising part of it to the deprived. But this does not lead very far. It reinforces the value system of capitalism. It does not appeal to aspirations which go beyond capitalism, which long for an alternative type of society. Revolutionary work has indeed to appeal to deeper, more fundamental aspirations, however pressing for the time being the struggle for higher wages and for the satisfaction of basic natural needs may be. It has to evoke the need for freedom and for association, if it wants to usher into an alternative society.

## 5. The survival of capitalism

Marx did not predict an automatic collapse of capitalism, but he certainly did not expect capitalism to survive for more than a century. In “Capital” he analysed the contradictions within the capitalist mode of production which were bound to create the conditions for its downfall. However, it would need the readiness of a well organised working class to interfere effectively at the time of fundamental crisis and to open the way to a new type of society through a proletarian revolution. The question arises why this revolution did not take place in the most developed capitalist countries, but only in the more backward societies of Russia and China, with all the repercussions this had for the construction of socialism.



Marx' analysis in "Capital" concentrates on the fundamental contradictions that evolve in the economic development of capitalism. But capitalism is not only an economic reality which as such, separately, can be overcome. In order to overcome capitalist economy with its disastrous consequences *bourgeois society* as a whole has to be overcome. That society has been able not only to mobilize overlooked and unforeseen economic resources, but also a whole scale of political, social, ideological and cultural forces for its survival. The point is to understand the "*reproduction of the capitalist relations of production*" as a total process involving all spheres of life.

The strength of capitalism, its capacity to survive, lies in the structure of its enterprises, in its laboratories, in its data-banks, in its trans-national operations as well as in its exploitation of the household labour of women; in state-guarantees of profit, in the repressive power of the state as well as in the measures of the welfare state. It has to be identified further in the persuasive power of the mass media, in the ideological appeal to national and racial identity, in the patterns of education, in the atomisation of social life, in the role of the family, in the repetitive patterns of daily life. This means that the struggle to overcome capitalism has to be fought neither only in the factories not only in running battles with the police but as well in the realms of science and technology, of family life, of city planning, and leisure time.

A few points may be commented upon. Others will be discussed elsewhere. The technological revolutions which have served the survival of capitalism and which were unforeseen in the time of Marx are often referred to. It needed marxist scholars in the women's movement to draw attention to a quite different source of strength which has been overlooked by male theoreticians, namely the role of *household labour* done by women. This is one of the sectors of subsistence production which has been made to serve the accumulation of capital in an indirect, rather hidden way.

Much attention has been given to the exploitation of women and children in capitalist factories. But what happened in the household was not analysed, as it seemed to remain outside the capital-relation. However, the unpaid household labour of women plays a crucial role in the reproduction and maintenance of the commodity labour-power without which capital cannot survive. As Marx wrote: "the maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital."<sup>19</sup> By far not all unpaid labour has been turned into wage-labour, as Marx originally may have



expected. A lot of subsistence production survives, including that of women in the household. Capital, however, has subordinated it to serve its purpose of accumulation. It did not destroy patriarchalism, the structures of male domination over women, but profited from its survival in the household as well as in the places of production. The struggle for women's liberation is therefore potentially a threat to one of the sources of the strength of capitalism.<sup>120</sup>

Capitalism did not turn all workers' wives into proletarian workers, but left them to work unpaid for the maintenance of the labour force and as reserve for underpaid work if needed. There were other sections which were not absorbed into the proletariat as expected, as for example the peasantry.<sup>121</sup> In many countries the proletariat did not become a numerically overwhelming majority. New definitions including the growing mass of salaried employees in the tertiary sector and higher echelons in industry have taken that into consideration. However, the point remains that the core of the industrial proletariat is no longer growing in numbers but rather rapidly declining under the impact of automatization technologies.

Not only the numbers but also the character and quality of the working class are affected by technological changes. In earlier days highly skilled workers provided leadership in the working class movement. They developed an alternative culture and had the potential to turn the rising working class into the leading class. But that chance was missed. Modern technology has meanwhile destroyed most of the skilled jobs. The cultural and educational level of today's working class in the developed capitalist countries is lower than it was some fifty or eighty years ago.

This lies in the line of Marx' analysis of the crippling effect of modern industry on the labourers, though he did not expect capitalism to get another century for pushing the workers into ever deeper dependence. Marx called it "the production and reproduction of the specifically capitalist relations of production".<sup>122</sup> Capitalist production produces not only products and surplus-value, but in doing so it also reproduces the relationship between capital and labour, capitalists and workers. And it does so "on a steadily increasing scale" and "in a fashion increasingly favourable to the one side, the capitalists, and increasingly unfavourable to the other side, the wage-labourers."<sup>123</sup>

*"The world of wealth expands and faces him as an alien world dominating him, and as it does so his subjective poverty, his need and dependence grow larger in proportion."*

Capitalism continues to impose material poverty wherever it can get



away with it, but the “*subjective poverty*” Marx refers to is not that of starvation conditions but of *total dependence*. It is the poverty of workers as subjects of their own life and history. It is their ever more growing dependence and powerlessness. It is the slavery which grows with the accumulation of capital “whether the worker receives better or worse payment”.<sup>124</sup> For example, in the past workers of one plant could push their demands through a well organised strike. Today the world-wide division of labour even within one giant company has proceeded so far that the workers of one factory have no longer that striking and paralysing power. Not only the single workers have become detail-labourers somewhere along the assembly line, but worker-collectives, all the labourers of one factory together are assigned to produce one detail of the product which will be assembled somewhere else. Even collectively they are losing strength on the local level over against the sky-scraping despotism of the global companies.

In other aspects also even the well paid workers have become more dependent. They have been persuaded to go in for a higher consumption level, facilitated by schemes of payment in instalments. They are watching TV sitting in comfortable furniture which still has to be paid for. They are driving cars which keep them in debts for years and years. They cannot afford to join risky actions because of these obligations on which their private life is built.

And what is more important, they may have come to accept their dependence and their powerlessness as a natural fact, as something unavoidable, so that indeed only the effort for the comfort of increasing consumption makes sense. Consciousness is determined by social being. The first generations of workers still remember other conditions of life, so that they rebel against their being subordinated to the interests of profit-making. One of the things capitalism imposes on them—one of its historical tasks according to Marx—is *labour discipline*. This disciplining takes generations. But once it has taken place it has to be expected that more has changed than only the outer behaviour of the workers.

*“The advance of capitalist production develops a working class, which by education, habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of Nature. The organisation of the capitalist process of production, once fully developed, breaks down all resistance”*<sup>125</sup>

Of course, Marx expected the working class organisations to kindle the spark of resistance and to mobilize the workers for the revolutionary



overthrow of the conditions which enslave them.

But these working class organisations also got affected by the capitalist set-up which they oppose. Critical marxists are pointing at two limitations. The discipline of the industrial workers has been taken as an asset and used to build up huge, well-disciplined mass organisations. Unions and parties are run like big enterprises, and the workers oblige like obedient soldiers. In that way they start mirroring the bureaucratic-technocratic set-up of capitalist organisations, reinforcing the powerlessness of the workers and their subordination.<sup>126</sup>

Lefebvre also points out that the working class organisations are limited in their revolutionary potential to the extent that they share the “ideology of the enterprise” and the assumptions of “economic rationality” adhered to by capitalism. They concentrate on the sphere of production and fail to see the other contradictions created by capitalism. There are the contradictions between centre and peripheries on the global, national and local level: with underdeveloped countries, regions and shanty towns. There are the contradictions arising from the marginalisation of more and more sections of people. The women continue to be marginalised with the help of patriarchal mechanisms. A growing number of unemployed or only occasionally employed have become marginal to the organised working class. Gorz has called them a “non-class of non-workers”.<sup>127</sup> He sees them as the representatives of post-industrial society. Still other contradictions are created by the increasing military spending which provokes a growing movement of protest. But workers who have jobs in industries which are dependent on military orders—as more and more industries are—may be hesitant to join, out of fear to lose their jobs. Similarly, the ecological movement virtually challenges capitalism and its logic of unending growth, but it has difficulty to win the support of workers who have learnt to live with pollution and to expect the security of their jobs from that very logic. However it turns out to be the logic of death. This can be seen not only in the fact that more and more resources are devoted to the production of means of mass-destruction. But the whole production process is based on the ever quicker replacement and thus destruction of the means of production and the products for the sake of turn-over and profit. The life-span of products is purposely cut short.

*“Science is assigned the character of death. It calculates the death of things and the death of men... All capitalist data function on the basis of death statistics”*<sup>128</sup>



The workers themselves are subjected to that logic of death. That is no reason to write off the working class as Gorz and Bahro tend to do. But there is no point either in evoking rhetorically the revolutionary virtues of the proletariat. Marxist analysis has to study carefully the changes in society affecting the place and outlook of the workers. It is not surprising that the industrial workers, disciplined by capitalism and by the threat of unemployment, are inclined to fight for their jobs and wages rather than risking these for the uncertain perspective of an alternative type of society. But it can also be shown that they are fighting a losing battle against computers and roboters and that only society based on a radical reduction, redistribution and re-orientation of labour offers a perspective. The tremendous changes in the labour-process under the impact of the latest technological revolution may persuade the workers to join hands with the movements for peace, for women's liberation and for protection of the environment to form a new broad revolutionary alliance aiming at a different society beyond capitalism with its logic of destruction. This leads us to the political field on which the following chapters will focus.

## NOTES

1. Cf. Capital I, 85, note 1.
2. Grundrisse, 107.
3. It is available in English translation as appendix in the Penguin edition of "Capital" with an introduction by E. Mandel.
4. Grundrisse, 108.
5. See Selected Correspondence, 104; and Mandel's Introduction to Capital, Penguin ed., 27 ff.
6. See Grundrisse, 102.
7. Capital I, Ch. 26.
8. For further introductions, see E. Mandel, Marxist Economic Theory, Baroda, and L. Huberman, Man's Worldly Goods, PPH, New Delhi, 1976.
9. Capital I, Ch. 1.
10. See Capital I, 149.
11. Capital I, 668.
12. I, 668.
13. I, 669.
14. I, 685.
15. Cf. Capital I, Ch. 29 "The Genesis of the Capitalist Farmer" and Ch. 31 "The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist"
16. Capital I, Penguin, 1027 ff.
17. Capital I, 151.



18. *ibid.*, 168.
19. See Capital III, 791-2.
20. See Capital I, Part 3, ch. 7-11.
21. See the article of Dipanker Gupta, "Formal and Real Subsumption of Labour under Capital. The Instance of Share Cropping", EPW, 27.9.1980.
22. See Capital I, 587 ff.
23. Capital I, 714.
24. See Capital I, Ch. 25.
25. Capital I, 599.
26. *ibid.*, 603.
27. *ibid.*, 604.
28. See Huberman, Man's Worldly Goods, 282.
29. Communist Manifesto, Sel. Works 1, 114.
30. See Stephen F. Cohen, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution. A Political Biography 1888-1938, New York 1975, Ch. I.
31. Lenin, Selected Works 1, 700.
32. *ibid.*
33. See Studies in the Theory of Imperialism, ed. by R. Owen & B. Sutcliffe, London, 1972.
34. Lenin, *op. cit.*, 692.
35. H. Magdoff, "Imperialism without colonies" in: Studies in the Theory of Imperialism, *op. cit.*, 164.
36. G. Lichtheim, Imperialism, London, 1971, 12 and 106.
37. Stephen Hymer, "The Internationalization of Capital" in: Socialist Digest No.6, Sept 1972, 61 and 58.
38. Hymer, *ibid.*, 66.
39. See Kittu Menon, "Contemporary Imperialism and Capital Export" in: Social Scientist 106, March 1982.
40. Capital I, 173 f.
41. Grundrisse, Pelican 1973, 611.
42. See Coll. Works 3, 274 ff.
43. Sel. Works 2, 68 f.
44. Capital I, 253.
45. *ibid.*, 252.
46. See Capital I, Ch. 13.
47. *ibid.*, Ch. 14.
48. H. Braverman, Labour and Monopoly Capital. The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century, Trivandrum, 1979, 66 & 68.
49. *ibid.*, 79 f.
50. *ibid.*, 81.
51. Capital I, 398.



52. *ibid.*, 380.
53. *ibid.*, 399.
54. Braverman, 193.
55. See Braverman, 110-118.
56. quoted by Braverman, 142.
57. *ibid.*, 313.
58. Capital I, 399 and Penguin ed., 548 f.
59. Capital I, Appendix, Penguin ed., 988.
60. *ibid.*, 990.
61. German Ideology, Sel. Works 1, 35 f.
62. Capital I, 457.
63. Capital I, 458; cf. T. Bottomore, "Socialism and the Division of Labour", in: *The Concept of Socialism*, ed. B. Parekh, Delhi, 1976, 155; and D. McLellan, "Marx and the Whole Man", *ibid.*, 62 ff.
64. Capital III, 820.
65. *ibid.*
66. Cf. Miklos Haraszti, *A Worker in a Worker's State. Piece-rates in Hungary*, Penguin 1977.
67. Capital I, 396.
68. *ibid.*, 399 f.
69. R. Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, NLB, 1978.
70. Capital III, 820.
71. Letter to Engels, 24.8.1867, Sel. Corr., 192.
72. Capital I, 51.
73. See I.I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, Detroit, 1972, ch. 14.
74. Capital I, 50.
75. *ibid.*, 81 f.
76. *ibid.*, 65 f.
77. *ibid.*, 85 note 1.
78. *ibid.*, 76 ff.
79. Capital I, Penguin ed., 107; cf. Moscow ed., 96.
80. Capital I, 133.
81. *ibid.*, 77.
82. *ibid.*, 80.
83. *ibid.*, 96.
84. *ibid.*, 105.
85. *ibid.*, 131 f.
86. *ibid.*
87. *ibid.*, 132 f.
88. *ibid.*, 90.



89. See Grundrisse, 221 ff.

90. See for example his praise for the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie in the Communist Manifesto.

91. See the quotation about the realm of necessity and of freedom from Capital III, 820.

92. Capital III, 776.

93. The German word "Stoffwechsel" has been translated literally with "exchange of matter" or "material reactions" in the Moscow translation, more appropriately with "metabolism" in the Penguin edition of "Capital"

94. Penguin ed., 283; shortly after this passage follows the comparison with the spider and the bees, quoted earlier from the Moscow ed. Capital I, 173 f.

95. Penguin ed., 290; cf. Moscow ed., 179.

96. Penguin, 134; Moscow, 50.

97. See Capital I, ch. 3,2.

98. Penguin, 637; Moscow, 474.

99. Penguin, 638.

100. Ibid.

101. Capital I, 571.

102. Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy, quoted by Rubin, 194.

103. cf. also B. Parekh, "Marx's Theory of Man" in: The concept of Socialism, 38 ff.

104. Parekh, op. cit., 43.

105. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, 1844, Coll. Works 3, 307 f.

106. ibid., 309.

107. ibid., 307.

108. ibid., 306.

109. ibid., 309.

110. Grundrisse.

111. Econ. and Phil. Man., Coll. Works 3, 306.

112. ibid., 304.

113. Coll. Works 3, 227 f.; cf. D. McLellan, "Marx and the whole man" in: The Concept of Socialism, op. cit., 65.

114. See McLellan, op. cit., 68 f. and cf. Grundrisse, 706.

115. Marx/Engels, On Religion, 47 f.

116. German Ideology, Coll. Works 5, 289.

117. Sel. Works 2, 75.

118. ibid., 76.

119. Capital I, 537.

120. See for this section: Gabriele Dietrich, "The Unfinished Task of a Marxist Conceptualisation of the Women's Question" in: The Marxist Review, May 1983.

121. See Ch. V.

122. Unpublished chapter, Capital I, Penguin ed., 1060 ff.



123. *ibid.*, 1062.

124. *Sel. Works* 3, 23.

125. *Capital* I, 689.

126. See for this critique, H. Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism*, London, 1978.

127. A. Gorz, *Abschied vom Proletariat*, Frankfurt, 1980, 62.

128. Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, 110.



## CHAPTER III

# Critique of the State

### 1. Introduction

We now move to politics. Here we face the problem that Marx did not write a systematic theory of politics as he did of economics. His reflections about state and revolution are not contained in one or two systematic studies, but spread all over his writings. We find them in sidelights on historical developments and in his commentaries on contemporary events. They stretch from references to the origin of the state in early history to the perspective of its abolition in communist society.

It is part of Marx' materialist conception of history that he takes history with its endless variety seriously. He is not satisfied with general abstract statements about the state. Of course, it is his conviction that politics is determined by economics. One cannot understand the state separately from the mode of production. But that does not mean that one can construct a theory of the state by logical deductions from the economic base. Certainly, the state does not come from heaven, it cannot be derived from ideas. It originates in the historical development of society. But the way in which this happens, the various forms which evolve, can be studied only by the *empirical observation* of historical facts. As Marx puts it in "German Ideology":

*"Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production".<sup>1</sup>*

The same demand returns in the third volume of Capital where Marx observes that "the same economic basis" shows "infinite variations and gradations in appearance", due to "innumerable different empirical circumstances", such as "natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences", etc.<sup>2</sup>

In the following we first introduce some of his historical insights about the origin and various forms of state. After that a more systematic



presentation of some basic aspects of Marx's theory of the state can be tried.

## 2. Origin of the State

One of the main concerns of the old Marx during the last years of his life was the study of forms of society in early human history. During the years 1880-1882 he took extensive notes of recent ethnological publications, especially of Lewis H. Morgan's study of "Ancient Society". His notebooks which are accessible now<sup>3</sup> give indirect insights in to Marx' thinking about the origin of the state. F. Engels has used them in his famous book "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan"<sup>4</sup> which was published in 1884, one year after Marx' death. L. Krader has pointed at certain differences between Marx and Engels, but these can be ignored in our present context.

Why were Marx and Engels so deeply interested in the study of the early evolution of human civilisation? Obviously not for academic reasons. The most fundamental question underlying their research was: is socialism, is *communism possible*. Does human nature allow a society based on free association and collective consultation? Can humankind do without the state as an organ of repression? Or are human beings doomed by their very nature to live in societies based on competition, exploitation and repression? In his early days Marx had reflected on human nature in a philosophical way. Once he had developed his material conception of history, statements about human nature had to be based on empirical investigations. That explains his deep interest in the ethnological studies of human evolution which appeared in the 1870's more or less inspired by Darwin's earlier study of biological evolution. These publications contained new material and insights about early human societies, showing that they were based not on greed for private property, class struggle and repression as later civilisations, but on co-operation and collective decision-making. That implied that human beings in history have been able to behave in a collective, democratic and egalitarian way. Such evidence gave a historical material foundation to the critique of the present civilisation and to the hope of a future communist society. What has been possible once is possible in the future also, be it in a new way on a higher level.

Morgan himself had developed this perspective in his studies. He spoke of liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of the early societies based on "gentes". He saw the striving for property as the



negative force which undermined that form of society. And he expected that the early principles could be revived on a higher plane:

*“Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. It will be a revival, in a higher form of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes”.*<sup>5</sup>

Engels comes to a similar optimistic conclusion about the fate of the state. Historical research has proved that the state “has not existed from all eternity”. It arose at a certain stage in connection with the development of classes. They will fall as they arose and “the state will inevitably fall” with them.<sup>6</sup>

Ethnological studies showed that it is possible—not inevitable—for humankind to overcome antagonistic class-society and to usher into a society based on free association. That was the most fundamental question Marx had in mind. Connected with it on a more concrete level were the questions raised by Russian revolutionaries. They asked whether the Russian peasant-commune which still existed could provide a basis for the construction of socialist society in Russia leaving out an epoch of capitalist development.<sup>7</sup> These studies stood furthermore in relation to Marx’ interest in the evolution of Asian societies which differed from the path followed in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

In our present context the main point is the insight that the state did not exist in the gens-based system of society and arose only in the process of the dissolution of that early form of society. Morgan had discovered the “gens”—instead of family—as the basic unit of primitive society through his studies of Indian tribes in America. “Gens” designates in his theory, and in that of Marx and Engels, a special community, based on kinship relations and the claim of common descent from a female ancestress—American Indians—or male ancestor as in Greek and Roman primitive society.<sup>9</sup> The fundamental rule of the gens was that no member was permitted to marry within it.<sup>10</sup> Three, four or more gentes could be united in a group which Morgan called phratry, i.e. brotherhood. And several phratries constituted a tribe. The gens had a council, the democratic assembly of all adult male and female members, a sachem as headman in times of peace and a chief as its leader in war. The tribe had a council for common affairs, consisting of all the sachems and war chiefs of the individual gentes. In this set-up everybody had the right to speak and the only coercive power was that of public opinion. Engels becomes lyrical about this organisation of society without state:



*"And this gentile constitution is wonderful in all its childlike simplicity. Everything runs smoothly without soldiers, gendarmes or police; without nobles, kings, governors, prefects or judges; without prisons, without trials. All quarrels and disputes are settled by the whole body of those concerned—the gens or the tribe or the individual gentes among themselves... All are free and equal—including the women... This is what mankind and human society were like before class divisions arose".<sup>11</sup>*

Engels adds, however, the crucial point that this is only one side of the picture. It is true only inside the narrow limits of the tribe. Beyond it was no other law regulating relations but the cruel law of war.

To observe the further development of tribal society and its dissolution, Morgan, Marx and Engels turned to the early history of Greece, Rome and Germany. After noting the existence of a similar gentile constitution they identified the factors which contributed to its decay: father right and the inheritance of property by the children, growing power of the family thanks to the accumulation of wealth, differentiation slowly leading to hereditary nobility and monarchy, development of slavery and systematic warfare for the purpose of capturing slaves and accumulating wealth.<sup>12</sup> Basically it was the appearance of *private property*, the development of a money and commodity economy and the division of labour leading to class society which undermined the gentile society. Practically this meant that the state arose in order to protect the newly acquired property of private individuals and the new forms of acquiring wealth.<sup>13</sup>

Marx speaks of state and politics as something which only arose when the collective institutions of tribal society could no longer function. Politics is for him the negation of real collective relationships. When Aristotle contends that "man" is a "political animal", Marx prefers to speak of "man" as a "social animal". The latter he is at all times, whereas the "political animal" of Aristotle appears on the scene only in the 'polis', the city of ancient Greece.<sup>14</sup>

Politics and the state are forms of *alienation* from the collective life of people. The main characteristics which distinguish the state from the old gentile order are the following: (1) The state divides its subjects no longer according to ties of blood and kinship, but according to territory. (2) It replaces the self-armed organisation of the population by a public power separated from the population, consisting of armed men, prisons and other institutions of coercion. (3) It raises taxes in order to finance this public power. All this separates the state from



society. "Having public power and the right to levy taxes, the officials now stand, as organs of society, above society".<sup>15</sup> They claim authority, even the "shabbiest police servant" does. But they no longer command the voluntary respect which the gentile chiefs enjoyed.

Engels also discusses how the Greek and Roman civilisation developed and decayed under the imperial Roman state and finally could be conquered by the German tribes.<sup>16</sup> At the time of conquest, the German tribes were still organised according to the gentile system. But the conquest itself forced them to replace the organs of the Roman State by other organs of State. Thus they transformed military leadership into kingship and replaced the council of chiefs by the king's permanent retinue.<sup>17</sup> Engels poses the question how these less developed, barbarian tribes nevertheless were able to infuse "new vitality into dying Europe".<sup>18</sup> He ascribes this not to any specific Aryan qualities—as many others did—but to "their barbarism", to "their gentile constitution" which was still alive. Their "love of liberty, and their democratic instinct, which regarded all public affairs as its own affairs" were qualities which the Romans had lost long ago, while the German tribes still plucked these fruits of the gentile constitution.<sup>19</sup> It was the same heritage which allowed them to avoid complete slavery and to settle for a milder form of servitude, which formed a better starting point for later emancipation.

These observations of Engels are not only of historical interest. They can be linked with the debate in the days of Marx and Engels about the possible contribution of the Russian village community, another archaic survival of ancient forms of society, to the socialist society of the future. And they can contribute to a less condescending approach to the possible role of those who are considered to be backward by the standards of "civilization". They may still carry elements of the human heritage of an early stage which could be of vital importance for the future society.

At the end of his book Engels formulates some more general statements about the state. It arose from the "need to *hold class antagonisms in check*". As a rule the economically dominant class becomes also the politically dominant class, using the state for holding down the oppressed class. By way of exception the state power may acquire a certain degree of independence as a mediator between the warring classes.<sup>20</sup> The examples which Engels cites show that it is necessary to go into some historical detail and to discuss various forms of state. As he wrote elsewhere, the general statement that the state is based on force does not explain anything about the different forms of



state, such as "the Oriental despotisms, the republics of antiquity, the Macedonian monarchies, the Roman Empire and the feudalism of the Middle Ages". Force is what they all have in common. But this force is not simply imposed from outside. It is based on a particular mode of production and takes particular forms. These connections have to be explored in concrete historical investigations.<sup>21</sup> Some of the insights of Marx and Engels into these various forms of the state will be discussed in the next sections.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. Forms of state in pre-capitalist society

#### a. *The despotic state of the tributary mode of production*

Marx was primarily interested in the economic structure of Oriental society, which he found characterised by the absence of private property in land, by the crucial role of the *village community*, and by the unity of small-scale agriculture and home industry which made the self-sufficiency of the communities possible. He saw these primitive village communities which were so close to tribal society as the base on which in some cases—not everywhere—powerful *central state* structures arose. Like his contemporaries and many writers before him, Marx called this type of state "oriental despotism". The same form of state he identified in Spain where it was based on a feudal mode.<sup>23</sup> The term "despotism" is misleading, as it evokes only the image of cruel repression and greed for power. However, this centralised state developed in India, China and elsewhere out of the need for a central political power to look after the common interests of the local village communities, especially through the maintenance of irrigation works. The class function of the state, its repressive and exploitative role developed side by side with its collective function in serving the common interests.<sup>24</sup>

Who formed the ruling class in this state, one may ask? Whose class interests did this state represent? Draper shows in detail that Marx implicitly took it for granted that the *state bureaucracy*, officialdom was the ruling class. The village-community held the land in common, and thus there was not a dominant class of private-property holding landlords.<sup>25</sup> The state itself was the landlord, and that meant practically the bureaucracy headed by the state sovereign or despot. It was the bureaucracy which extracted the surplus product in the form of tribute from the village communities. That means in this "tributary mode *economic exploitation and political rule are fused in the same hands*".<sup>26</sup> That also means that in this case the power of the ruling class was not based on private ownership of means of production, but on



control over the state apparatus. Marx gives an example in a footnote to "Capital",<sup>27</sup> where he refers to the rule of the priest caste in Egypt over agriculture. Successful agriculture depended on the knowledge of the priests who calculated with the help of astronomy the periods of the Nile's overflow. Their rule over agriculture arose from their monopoly of science and their dominant place in the state apparatus.

While discussing various forms of labour-rent in Capital III Marx points at the difference between the situation of the direct producers, the peasants, in the asiatic and in the feudal modes of production. In both modes the peasants possess their means of production and conduct their work independently, not like slaves. In both modes there is bondage to the soil and "lack of personal freedom". The difference is that the feudal serf is under the direct control of his landlord all the time, whereas the peasant in the asiatic mode is dependent on the state as the landlord to whom he has to pay tribute.<sup>28</sup>

Draper points out<sup>29</sup> that the state in the tributary system according to Marx is not the organ or instrument of a ruling class of landlords, but it is the supreme landlord itself. Stalin and Soviet scholars till recently ruled out the possibility of a state arising in a society without a class of private owners of the means of production.<sup>30</sup> However, for Marx the concept of a state bureaucracy as a ruling class does obviously not contradict his theory of the state. Immediately following his comparison of the asiatic and feudal modes of production, where he speaks of the direct producers in Asia being "under direct subordination to a state which stands over them as their landlord and simultaneously as sovereign", he comes to a concentrated statement of his general theory of the state. There he calls the state the "*political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence*" which corresponds to the "economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of direct producers".<sup>31</sup>

#### *b. The landlord state of the feudal mode of production*

Unfortunately Marx never found time for a systematic analysis of the early development of the feudal mode of production and its political forms. He concentrated mainly on the later period of absolutism which was directly connected with the development of capitalism. In his detailed study Draper has traced only a few scattered remarks of Marx about early feudalism. More can be found in the study of the british marxist Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*.<sup>32</sup>

The feudal mode of production as it developed in Europe in the



early Middle Ages was not the result of a new rising class coming to power as it was the case with the bourgeoisie in the development of capitalism. Feudalism developed in the aftermath of the conquest of the Roman empire by German tribes, and it was the outcome, at least partly of "a reciprocal interaction", a "synthesis" between the mode of production of Roman Antiquity and of the primitive mode of production of German tribes.<sup>33</sup> Both modes were in a process of disintegration. Out of the catastrophic collision of both, the feudal order slowly arose and spread throughout medieval Europe.<sup>34</sup> The typical feudal institutions had different origins.<sup>35</sup> For example, the feudal monarch was a mixture of the Germanic war leader and the Roman imperial ruler.

It was in the 9th century that the fundamental institution of feudalism, the *feudum* (latin) or "fief" got established. The "fief" was a grant of land given by the ruler in exchange for military service. It implied not only economic power over the land and the peasants living on it, but also juridical and political power. The holder of a fief was not only the landlord, but also the judge and ruler of the people on his land. But he himself was dependent on his superior and obliged to do military knight-service if needed.

This feudal system was *hierarchical*. There was not one centre of power, but various levels of power. Even the peasants were not completely powerless, as there remained communal lands and pockets of independent peasant owners. Above the peasantry held in serfdom at the bottom, arose a pyramid of local landlords, barons, counts, dukes and finally monarchs. Between these various layers there was permanent conflict, with strong centrifugal tendencies. The character of political power differed very much from that in later times. There was no central executive power with a permanent administrative apparatus of the state for the enforcement of the law. The most central institution was the church. The administration of justice was left to the lords and local courts. Neither was there legislative power in the modern sense. The rulers were supposed to preserve traditional laws.<sup>36</sup>

The most striking feature, noticed repeatedly by Marx, was the *fusion of political and economic power in the hands of the local rulers*. This differs from the situation in the tributary mode of production where the fusion took place at the highest level, at the centre, thus leading to powerful forms of despotism. Early feudalism shows a picture of many local despots, holding both economic and political power, and feuding among themselves to extend or defend their fiefs. This means that the landowning aristocracy, the nobility, the propertied



ruling class was at the same time automatically the political ruling class. The baron was the state for the serf under him. His economic power was at the same time political power. In his early piece "On the Jewish Question", Marx points at this direct political character of feudal society. It was dissolved through the political emancipation brought about by the bourgeois revolution which separated the political sphere from the sphere of civil society.<sup>37</sup>

c. *The Absolutist State in the period of transition to capitalism*

The French Revolution of 1789 was directed against the Ancient Regime of a state in which the ruling monarch had far-reaching powers and in which land-owning aristocracy and clergy played a dominant role. This form of state has been called the "absolutist state", referring to the absolute powers centralised in the hands of the monarch. Various forms of this absolutism can be found all over Europe in the period stretching from the late Middle Ages down to the 19th century. For a historical materialist approach the question arises what the *class character* of the absolutist state was. The French Revolution was an anti-feudal upheaval bringing the bourgeoisie to power. Does this mean that the absolutist states were feudal states? But then how to explain that capitalism developed already centuries before the French Revolution and that the feudal nobility often violently protested against the absolutist state? Opinions are divided in marxist studies of this problem.

Marx and Engels commented at several occasions on the character of the absolutist state as something which was closely connected with the long period of transition from feudalism to capitalism. The fragmentation of state power in the hands of local lords in the early days of feudalism did not last. In one way or the other the monarchy centralised power. This meant that the feudal lords remained land-owners and kept their economic power over the peasantry but lost the direct political power which they exercised in the early stage of feudalism.

Engels locates the decay of feudalism in the 15th century.<sup>38</sup> As main subversive factors he lists the rise of towns and cities, the increasing role of money, the growing dependency of the nobility on the urban industries (weapons) and money, and the new techniques of war which made the nobility dispensable. However, this decay of the feudal nobility did not yet lead to the victorious rise to power of the burghers (bourgeoisie) but to the establishment of strong monarchical national states. He concludes that in the general chaos of disintegrating feudalism

*"royal power was the progressive element. It represented order in*



*confusion, and the budding nation as opposed to dismemberment into rebellious vassal states. All the revolutionary elements taking shape under the feudalistic surface gravitated just as much towards royalty as the latter gravitated towards them*".<sup>39</sup>

The power of royalty grew thanks to its alliance with burgherdom against the nobility. However, as Engels remarked in a note for a revised edition of the "Peasant War", the absolute monarch did not abolish the Estates of feudal society, nobility and clergy, and he proposes therefore, to designate it rather as an "estate monarchy" which means "still feudal, in decay, and bourgeois in embryo".<sup>40</sup>

Marx and Engels developed the theory that the absolute monarchy, because of this peculiar constellation, represented a form of *relative state autonomy*. It was neither the instrument only of the feudal nobility nor of the rising bourgeoisie. Both classes were contending for power, but neither could win. This balance or equilibrium of contending class forces gave scope for the state power to develop a certain degree of independence. In "German Ideology" they described the epoch of absolute monarchy as a period of transition in which the estates were no more estates and the classes were not yet born and therefore, no social force was able to "gain exclusive domination". As a consequence the special sphere of administration of public interests acquired "an abnormal independence, which became still greater in the bureaucracy of modern states".<sup>41</sup>

Engels speaks in an article in 1847 of the central power of the state, represented by the king—in this case of Prussia—supported by the bureaucracy, "the numerous class of government officers, civil and military" and the army, which was able to

*"keep down the middle classes by the nobility, and the nobility by the middle classes, by flattering now the interests of the one, and then those of the other and balancing as much as possible, the influence of both"*.<sup>42</sup>

And he states that "this stage of absolute monarchy has been gone through by almost all the civilised countries of Europe".<sup>43</sup>

#### **4. Forms of state in capitalist society**

Most of Marx' writing about the state relates to political conditions in capitalist society. In this society there is a *separation of politics and economics* which hides the face of the bourgeoisie as the ruling class. Representative institutions of parliament, democratic rights and slogans of freedom and equality suggest that all have a share and stake in the



modern state. People of different class background are found in the highest offices. We are told that a shoe-shining boy can become the president of the U.S.A. And some ministers or other officials are sometimes from working class background. Marx' theory of the class character of the state served primarily the purpose to tear away this veil of the modern state and to reveal the identity of the real rulers: the bourgeoisie. It is of the "modern representative state" that he says in 1848 that its executive "is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie".<sup>44</sup>

In another connection he writes 20 years later about "state power" in capitalist France as the "national power of capital over labour, of a public force organised for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism".<sup>45</sup> However, marxists have sometimes changed this thrust of Marx' theory of the class character of the state into a dogmatic slogan which fails to make a concrete analysis of various forms of state within capitalism and their progressive and reactionary aspects in a dialectical manner. As we have discussed in the chapter on historical materialism, the political super-structure is not a mere mechanical or automatic reflection of economic life. Otherwise the state would be the same in all capitalist countries, which it is not. In his political testament "Critique of the Gotha Program" (1875), Marx distinguishes between "certain essential characteristics in common" and a "diversity of form". "The 'present-day state' changes with a country's frontier".<sup>46</sup>

Because in capitalist society economy and politics have become separate spheres, economic power is not automatically translated into political power. The ruling class, the bourgeoisie, is not automatically the governing class. A clear example is Britain, the most advanced capitalist country in Marx' days, of which he writes in 1855:

*"Actually the British constitution is just an old-fashioned, antiquated and archaic compromise between the bourgeoisie, which rules **unofficially** but effectively over all the spheres of civil society, and the landed aristocracy which rules officially".*<sup>47</sup>

We cannot go into all the different forms and combinations, but we will discuss Marx's views with regard to the more democratic and the more authoritarian forms of bourgeois state.

#### a. *Bourgeois democracy*

The absolutist regimes which dominated most of Europe were successively overthrown in a series of revolutions in the 18th, 19th and 20th century. It started with the English Revolution in the middle of the 18th century and the crucial French Revolution at the end of the 18th



century and ended with the overthrow of the Tsarist regime in Russia in 1917 and the collapse of the Habsburg Empire and the German Empire at the end of the First World War. The driving force of the English and French Revolutions was the rising class of the bourgeoisie. It articulated the new political ideology of democracy, of freedom and equality. Against the divine rights of the absolute kings it proclaimed the human rights of all. Against the privileges of nobility and clergy it proclaimed the equality of the citizens. Raising the banner of freedom and equality against these oppressive regimes the bourgeoisie was able to mobilize the support of the masses of the people behind them. As a result the bourgeois state had to present itself as a democratic state, i.e. as a state in which the people as a whole ruled.

Marx leaves no doubt that the new *representative state* with its democratic rights, with its constitution, parliament and elections, with its equality before the law, etc., yet is a state ruled by the bourgeoisie and not by the people as a whole. It is bourgeois democracy and not people's democracy. Many people find it hard to accept this critical assessment of bourgeois democracy. They point at the changes of governments, at aristocratic landlord-parties or social-democratic workers parties coming to power through elections and argue that the representative state is an instrument of society as a whole, offering any section of it the chance to come to power or to share in it.

Marxist theory does not deny that the representative state is related to society as a whole, but it points at the bourgeois character of that society. It is a class society in which the bourgeoisie is the dominating class. The state serves the purpose of keeping that society as it is in good order and thus it reinforces the dominating role of the bourgeoisie.

Marxist theory analyses the representative state in connection with the capitalist mode of production. In capitalism there is a division between the political and the economic sphere. The producer, the worker, is not under the direct domination of his employer, as it was the case with the slave or the serf. He is "free" to move from one job to another. Or rather capital is free to hire and fire, without responsibility for what happens to those who are fired. Capital needs this mobility of labour. As a result the worker is 'free' to sell his labour power.<sup>48</sup> That is the *freedom of the market*, based on the freedom of private property. The capitalist who hires a labourer and a labourer who sells his labour-power are in a formal sense free and equal. This sphere of the market is, as Marx says in his sarcastic manner, "a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property



and Bentham". Indeed there alone the rules of the game are the same for all. But they start from fundamentally unequal positions, the capitalists as owners of the means of production, the workers as non-owners who have to sell their labour-power. And that is why a different game is on as soon as the sale of labour-power is concluded and buyer and seller move from the public market-place to the "hidden abode of production", where there is "no admittance except on business".<sup>49</sup> There the one who sold his labour-power has no freedom or equality whatsoever (let workers try to take photographs of this hidden abode where they spend most of their life-time). There capital is the despot and the worker a slave.

The despotism of capital is protected by the same state and law which guarantees the *right of private property* and the other civil rights. These other rights are not meaningless, as we will see later, but they are severely limited by the freedom of capital based on the right of private property. It is because of that fundamental freedom of capital in bourgeois society, protected by the state, that the other rights and democratic procedures and representations do not affect the class rule of the bourgeoisie. The contention of Marx is that (political) freedom is an illusion as long as capital rules in society. Political and economic powers are no longer in one hand as in the ancient oriental empires or in feudal society. The capitalists may leave the running of the government to others, but they control economic life and that is decisive. No government can ignore that. Whether aristocrats or social-democrats, when presiding over a state government in a capitalist society they have to adapt to that reality. However, their presence at the helm of political affairs serves the purpose to conceal the dominant role of capital in all affairs.

There is a further reason why the bourgeoisie often leaves it to others to run the state. Marx and Engels often expressed the opinion that the bourgeoisie by its very nature as a class of competing entrepreneurs and businessmen was rather incapable of ruling and pursuing its common interests on the political level. They cannot trust each other in business. How can they trust somebody from their own ranks with political power on behalf of the class as a whole? Why should another U.S. businessman trust that a Rockefeller would also protect his interests. "Internally, capitalism is a snake-pit".<sup>50</sup> Capitalists are all the time ready to devour each other. That is how in capitalist society the need for *professional politicians* arises, often lawyers, who as individuals can come from any class background, but whose function is to serve the interests of the bourgeois system and capitalist class as a whole. The individual capitalist pursues his short-sighted interest of



maximum profit. But the capitalist class needs statesmen, who have a larger, long-sighted vision of the interests of the system as a whole. Sometimes it may be necessary to make certain concessions to the working class or to impose certain restrictions on one or the other section of the bourgeoisie, which many capitalists may resent and resist, though it is in their larger interest. This is one aspect of the famous statement in the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" that the "executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the *whole* bourgeoisie".

To manage its common affairs the bourgeoisie may even accept a Bismarck, as it happened in Germany, who came from a Junker (landlord) background. He forced Germany in the latter part of the 19th century through the process of modernisation which was needed for the full development of capitalism.<sup>51</sup> In England we have another example of the bourgeoisie leaving the governing power to a large extent to the aristocracy under the assumption that it will serve its interests. Afraid of the rising working class the bourgeoisie is ready to compromise with landed aristocracy. At a later stage it also accepted social-democratic governments which imposed certain limited reforms—against the resistance of many capitalists—as it was necessary for the stability of the system as a whole.

These various examples and the comments of Marx and Engels show that the state in capitalist society is not so simply a tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie. While the bourgeoisie is the ruling class in civil society, its control over the state is often indirect. It shares power with others or has its interests promoted by others. For this it has to pay a price. After all it is strange for a ruling class to be compelled to leave the governing to others. This complex relationship between the bourgeoisie as ruling class and the state enables the state to acquire a relative autonomy in its relationship to the ruling class. This Marx and Engels discussed especially in connection with the second Empire of Louis Bonaparte in France (1851-1870).

#### *b. The authoritarian state or Bonapartism*

The revolutions of 1848 which spread over large parts of Europe got all defeated. They taught the lesson that bourgeois democracy was not safe in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois elements were rising against autocratic or authoritarian rulers and regimes but they did not go for a radical confrontation. Fear of the rising working class made them stop half-way and compromise with aristocracy and monarchy. A special development took place in France which brought about a new form of state, Bonapartism, which Marx and Engels analysed extensively. The



concept of Bonapartism is not only of historical interest. It played a role in the marxist discussion about the character of the Emergency-regime in India (1975-1977).

The rule of Bonaparte III in France lasted for two long decades from 1850-1870, and the comments of Marx and Engels in the course of this time give a deeper insight in their analysis of political phenomena and the relationship of state and society. "The Eighteenth Brumaire", strongly recommended by Engels to students of Marxism as an example of concrete historical materialist analysis, was written by Marx in 1852 shortly after Louis Bonaparte had seized power. In 1859 Marx wrote a number of articles for the New York Tribune at a time when the regime took extreme steps towards military based rule. And in "The Civil War in France" written during and after the Paris Commune in 1871, Marx looks back upon the whole period.

The revolution of 1848 had overthrown the constitutional monarchy headed by Louis Philippe which had the support of one section of the bourgeoisie. It had led to the proclamation of a republic which soon was controlled by bourgeois republicans. They provoked the proletariat into the June uprising, which Marx called "the most colossal event in the history of European Civil Wars".

*"The bourgeois republic triumphed. On its side stood the aristocracy of finance, the industrial bourgeoisie, the middle class, the petty bourgeois, the army, the lumpenproletariat organised as the Mobile Guard, the intellectual lights, the clergy and the rural population. On the side of the Paris proletariat stood none but itself. More than three thousand insurgents were butchered after the victory, and fifteen thousand were transported without trial. With this defeat the proletariat passes into the background of the revolutionary stage".<sup>52</sup>*

This brutal repression "revealed that here bourgeois republic signifies the unlimited despotism of one class over other classes".<sup>53</sup> However, the bourgeoisie was unable to enjoy the political fruits of its victory. It did not succeed in establishing and maintaining a firm and direct control of state power. It could not rule France itself. It was divided into three dynastic parties and a fourth republican party.

*"Its internal dissensions allowed the adventurer Louis Bonaparte to take possession of all the commanding points — army, police, administrative machinery — and, on December 2, 1851, to explode the last stronghold of the bourgeoisie, the National Assembly. The Second Empire began — the exploitation of France by a gang of*



political and financial adventurers, but at the same time also an industrial development such as had never been possible under the ... system of Louis Philippe, with the exclusive domination of only a small section of the big bourgeoisie.”<sup>54</sup>

Marx analysed the process leading to the coup in detail, showing how the bourgeois politicians “destroyed all conditions of parliamentary power with their own hands.”<sup>55</sup> They did not put up a real fight when Bonaparte usurped more and more political power, leaving the parliament a mere talking-shop, and finally overruling it with the help of the army in the coup of Dec. 1851. Marx describes how the parliamentary majority fell apart because of desertions “out of sheer egoism, which makes the ordinary bourgeois always inclined to sacrifice the general interest of his class for this or that private motive.” He concludes that the political power of the bourgeoisie had to be broken in order to preserve its social power.<sup>56</sup>

Bonaparte’s coup of Dec. 1851 created a new form of state which had to be analysed. The gigantic state apparatus, “this executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation ... this appalling parasitic body”<sup>57</sup> seemed to have become independent from any class in society. It had been created, taken over and expanded in the course of time by the bourgeoisie as a means for its class rule. But now the bourgeoisie itself seemed to have lost control over it.

What was the *relationship* of this state and the classes in society? Marx answers on the one hand that Bonaparte represented the numerically large class of small holding peasants. But as he put it in 1871, this was only the passive economic basis of the Second Empire. The state was by no means a tool in the hands of the peasantry to promote its class interests. Objectively it rather promoted the material interests of the bourgeoisie and its industry and trade, though it had broken its political power. To explain the extraordinary phenomenon of the far-reaching autonomy of the Bonapartist state, Marx and Engels developed the thesis of a *class equilibrium* between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Because both contending classes were exhausted and unable to exercise power, Bonaparte could play them off in a balancing act which gave his regime large room for expanding its own power. As Engels wrote, neither the working class, not the bourgeois royalists of the Party of Order had been able to hold power. Making use of the divisions, Bonaparte could move in utilising the peasant vote and the army’s force and “assume a more or less absolute sway over those classes, none of which after a four years’ bloody struggle had proved strong enough to seize upon a lasting supremacy”.<sup>58</sup>



In the final outcome the economic policies of the Bonapartist regime served the interests of the bourgeoisie. But Marx and Engels paid also attention to independent aspects of these economic policies, especially in the latter half of the fifties. There were some disciples of the utopian socialist St. Simon in Bonaparte's economic brain trust and Marx detected in what he called "Bonapartist socialism" or "Imperial socialism" moves to expand the economic power of the state. There was an attempt to bring all French industry indirectly under state control. Using an expression of Fourier he calls it "industrial feudalism". The Bonapartist regime did not succeed in establishing a sort of state economy. But what is interesting from a theoretical point of view is that Marx assumed the possibility of a despotic control over production by the state in capitalist society.<sup>59</sup>

In 1858 Marx wrote an article for the N.Y. Tribune on the crisis of the Bonapartist regime under the title "The Rule of the Pretorians". He notices that the regime has moved to "the rule of the naked sword" (as in the case of the Pretorians in ancient Rome). Before that it were classes which used the army for their purposes. But the new thing about this state is that it no longer serves the interests of a particular social class but only the interests of its own survival.

*"The army is no longer to maintain the rule of one part of the people over another part of the people. The army is to maintain its own rule, personated by its own dynasty, over the French people in general. It is to represent the State in antagonism to the society."*<sup>60</sup>

Elsewhere Marx characterises this regime as "military and bureaucratic despotism".<sup>61</sup> His prediction that this regime without social base outside its own gigantic bureaucratic machinery could not survive did not come true. Bonaparte turned back to accommodate the bourgeoisie and lasted for another decade. The relationship state-society was restored as the regime took into consideration the interests of the bourgeoisie. In the long run this autonomized state did serve the bourgeois interests. It did so by checking the advance of the proletarian revolution and by providing the conditions for the modernisation of society.

This Marx recognised looking back at the time of the Paris Commune in a summarising characteristic of the Bonapartist empire. He confronts the claims of the regime with the reality. It claimed to serve all classes. "It professed to rest upon the peasantry ... It professed to save the working class by breaking down Parliamentarism" which subordinated the government to the propertied classes. "It professed to save the propertied classes by upholding their economic supremacy over the



working class; and finally it professed to unite all classes by reviving for all the chimera of national glory." The reality was different. In reality this peculiar regime resulted from the political stalemate between the bourgeoisie and the working class:

*"it was the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation."*

But this did not mean that it served both classes equally. The final outcome showed that it served the development of bourgeois society. "Under its sway bourgeois society, freed from political cares, attained a development unexpected even by itself. Its industry and commerce expanded to colossal dimensions." With it financial swindling and corruption, the misery of the masses and the luxury of the rich expanded. It turned out that this imperial form of state was "the most prostitute and the ultimate form of the state power" which bourgeois society had developed originally as a mean to free itself from feudalism and in its final full-grown form used to enslave labour under capital.<sup>62</sup>

In the light of Marx' final views of the Bonapartist state some marxist scholars feel that Marx had over-stated the case of state-autonomy in his earlier assessments of Bonapartism. However, the main point is not whether historically he was right with his analysis of the Bonapartist regime, but that theoretically he saw no contradiction to his theory of state in the assumption that the state could reach such an independence under certain conditions. Apart from that, his theory of Bonapartism has played a significant role in the analysis of political developments and regimes elsewhere. Engels used it to characterise the regime of Bismarck in Prussia. The social foundation of the old absolute monarchy had been the equilibrium, the balance in the struggle between the landed aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. But the rapid industrial development brought about the struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat, creating "the basic condition of modern Bonapartism — an equilibrium between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat". However, this change in the basic condition did not bring a change in the "special caste of army officers and state officials" in whose hands "the real governmental authority lies".

*"The independence of this caste, which appears to occupy a position outside and, so to speak, above society, gives the state the semblance of independence in relation to society."*<sup>63</sup>

It is only the semblance of independence, as the power of the ruling caste to play off the contending classes against each other is



itself the “necessary product of the social basis” out of which the Prussian state in its present form developed. Furthermore, Bonapartism represented in the case of Prussia a modern form of state as compared to the preceding “semi-feudal state”, because it completed the bourgeois revolution by abolishing the remnants of feudalism.<sup>64</sup>

Lenin used the theoretical model of Bonapartism to warn against certain developments in revolutionary Russia in July 1917. A coalition government had been formed of bourgeois Cadets and Socialist-Revolutionaries and was supported by the Mensheviks. Lenin warned against illusions that the new Cabinet headed by the Socialist-Revolutionary Kerensky would represent a shift to the Left. He called Kerensky instead a Bonapartist and his government “a cabinet taking the first steps towards Bonapartism”.<sup>65</sup>

*“We see the chief historical symptom of Bonapartism: the manoeuvring of state power, which leans on the military clique (on the worst elements of the army) for support, between two hostile classes and forces which more or less balance each other out”.*<sup>66</sup>

The two hostile classes were the bourgeoisie which was unable to take the power entirely and the proletariat organised in the Soviets which did not want to take power. And thus it fell into the hands of the Bonapartists, backed by the landowners and capitalists.<sup>67</sup>

Lenin used the concept to distinguish the new *bourgeois counter-revolution* from the old tsarist counter-revolution. The Bonapartist government tries to win support from the left by pointing at the pressures and dangers from the (tsarist) Right. It wants the people to believe that it defends the “revolution in general” against the threats of tsarist counter-revolution. Thus it conceals its true character as a “government of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie”. In this connection Lenin calls Bonapartism “a form of government which grows out of the counter-revolutionary nature of the bourgeoisie, in the conditions of democratic changes and a democratic revolution”.<sup>68</sup> Soon after this he wrote his “State and Revolution” in which the references to the Paris Commune after the fall of the Bonapartist regime play a crucial role.

The Marxist Review has applied the concept of Bonapartism in its analysis of the political developments in India in the mid-seventies. In August 1974 it came out with an editorial pointing at the progress of Mrs. Gandhi along the road towards her “Eighteenth Brumaire”. Already in 1971 it analysed the erosion of the Congress monolith and the threat this process implied to the hegemony of the ruling class



while resulting in the strengthening of the relative position of power of the bureaucracy. In that connection *The Marxist Review* spoke of the possibility that the "continuation of a static equilibrium will give rise to an authoritarian regime".<sup>69</sup> With the help of this theoretical approach it was possible to distinguish the Emergency regime of 1975-77 from a fascist state. It was Bonapartist: it was the coup of a populist leader commanding the passive loyalty of large sections of the rural masses, it was the victory of the executive power over the legislative power.<sup>70</sup>

c. *Excursus: The Fascist State*

The 20th century saw a new form of state arising within the framework of capitalist society, the fascist state. The theoretical discussion among marxists and others about the causes and nature of fascism is still going on. In the context of this book only a few references can be made, mainly to stress that the study of Marx does not provide ready-made formulas for the labelling of new political phenomena, but some of the basic tools for fresh analysis.

Unfortunately, when fascism arose in Italy—where it came to power in 1923—few marxists were ready to analyse this new phenomenon on its own terms. The official communist movement for a long time explained it as the outcome of the deepening crisis of capitalism, turning the most disastrous defeats of the working class movement at the hands of the fascists and National-socialists into minor setbacks shortly before the inevitable victory of the proletarian revolution. Many marxists had forgotten that Marx and Engels did not proclaim the unavoidable progress of history towards socialism. In the "Manifesto of the Communist Party", they already spoke of the fact that class struggles can end in victorious revolution or in the common ruin of the contending classes. Engels wrote in "Anti-Duehring" that bourgeois society was moving towards ruin or revolution. And he saw the proletariat in capitalism in a situation in which it must successfully interfere and bring about the classless society or otherwise sink "to the level of the Chinese coolie".<sup>71</sup> Rosa Luxemburg had reminded the working class during the horrors of the First World War of the historical alternative between socialism or barbarism. What came after the proletarian revolution failed in Germany and Italy was the barbarism of fascism and the Second World War.

Initially—till it was too late—the Communist International underestimated the fascist movement as a symptom of bourgeois decadence. Some insisted that basically there was no difference between bourgeois democracy and fascist dictatorship. This latter would reveal



the true nature of bourgeois tyranny and thus hasten the day of the proletarian revolution. Only at a late stage the Comintern changed its position and defined fascism in a way which *distinguished it from bourgeois democracy*. The new definition said: "Fascism is the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, most imperialist elements of finance capital". In the "Lectures on Fascism" given by the Italian communist leader Togliatti, some of the specific characteristics of fascism are worked out. In addition to the definition just given he points out that this dictatorship of one section of the bourgeoisie, that of finance capital, is based on a movement of petty-bourgeois masses. That is the essential difference with "Bonapartism".<sup>72</sup>

Present-day marxist authors<sup>73</sup> show that the analysis has to start from the *fascist mass-movement*. Its cadres were elements of various social background which were uprooted by the First World War. Its social basis was the petty bourgeoisie of the lower middle class, peasantry, ex-combatants, university students, shopkeepers, etc.—and other sections which were threatened by the advance of modern capitalism. Its *ideology* appealed to national frustrations and fear of economic ruin. It blamed the international working class movement and bourgeois democracy for the problems of the nation and the economy. It criticised capitalism while defending private property. It projected a strong dictatorial leadership and national greatness and military strength as the answer to the crisis. National-socialism distinguished itself from this pattern by making the Jews the main scapegoat. Its form of organisation was militaristic and it used violence and terror to intimidate its enemies on the left and to undermine the bourgeois democracy which it wanted to overthrow. It preached and practised the cult of violence and the cult of unconditional obedience to the leader.

Fascist movements were coming up all over Europe between the world wars, but succeeded only in some countries. This cannot be explained if fascism was only an instrument of finance capital. In that case it should have been able to replace bourgeois democracy as well in U.S.A., or Britain or France. Several conditions for its success can be pinpointed. a) A deepening socio-economic crisis increased the mass-base of fascist movements. b) It needed however the co-operation and support of the ruling capitalist class to come to power. Without its finance and without the direct or indirect support of police, army, bureaucracy, press and judges no fascist movement was successful. c) It depended also on the defeat or the mistakes of the Left where it was strong. In Italy fascism became victorious only after the failure of the revolutionary upsurge of the Left in 1919-1920. After that the Left



failed to defend energetically the institutions of bourgeois democracy. In Germany the communists fought the Social-Democrats as the main enemy and as “social-fascists” and actively contributed to the undermining of the institutions of the Weimar Republic. In France on the other hand the Popular Front coalition of 1936 defeated the fascist movement.

Barrington Moore has forwarded the convincing thesis that bourgeois democracy was more resistant against the fascist tide where capitalism had developed after a thorough successful bourgeois revolution as in U.S.A. and France. In Germany and Japan capitalism developed through a revolution from above. A weak bourgeoisie was allied with precapitalist classes which got united by militarism and imperialism. On the other side of the social scale we find petty-bourgeois masses economically and psychologically uprooted by a rapid transition from an agricultural to an industrial society.<sup>74</sup> The latter aspect is particularly significant for consideration in India, where a fascist mass-movement is yet lacking—fortunately—but where several of the elements of fascism as discussed above are present already.

## 5. Aspects of Marx’ theory of the state

This section is meant to present Marx’ views on the state in a more systematic way. The focus will be on the capitalist state, the main target of Marx’ critique and of the proletarian revolution which he wanted to serve.

### a. *The alienation of the state from society*

The young Marx developed his thinking about state and society through a critical analysis of the political philosophy of *Hegel* which played a dominant role at that time and which had shaped his own thinking very much.<sup>75</sup> For Hegel, the *state*, the political realm, is the highest form and expression of the collective life of society. In it all the common concerns of people are taken up, in contrast with the sphere of economic life, called “*civil society*” which is characterised by the private interests and conflicting strivings of human individuals.

Marx shared the quest for human realisation in public life, but he found that Hegel’s state offered only an illusionary solution to the quest for common life. He called it a mystification to suggest that in politics people transcend the private interests which determine their actions in civil society, in economics. There can be no liberation in the state when there continues to be bondage in civil society. The very fact that society needs a state shows that there is something wrong in society. The great political struggles of the previous century which had



raised high hopes of human liberation, the American and French revolutions, had achieved *political* emancipation. They proclaimed civil rights and political freedom. But they did not bring *human* emancipation, because the individual was still in bondage in bourgeois society whatever his political rights. In the state he may be a "citizen" but in society he is a "bourgeois". In society he has to continue to pursue his private interests at the cost of others. As a citizen he is supposed to be responsible for common concerns, but as a bourgeois he has to compete and to exploit. Thus "man" leads a double life, Marx says, "a heavenly one and an earthly one".

*"He has a life both in the political community, where he is valued as a communal being, and in civil society where he is active as a private individual, treats other men as means, degrades himself to a means and becomes the plaything of alien powers".<sup>76</sup>*

In his "earthly life", that is in the day-to-day practical life of capitalist society the individual acts as an egoistic being, treating others as means for his ends and being treated as a means by others. On that level he cannot realise his human life as the life in community with others. Therefore he ascribes the life-in-community to the state, to the realm of higher politics, just as a religious person projects the fulfilment of life into heaven. Both the heaven of religion and the heaven of the state are phantastic, illusionary realisations of true human being.

Thus Marx, writing in 1842-43, sees in the state as understood by Hegel and his followers another form of alienation, another type of escape from reality, another form of religion. Accordingly he predicts not only the end of religion but also the abolishing of the state as the result of real human emancipation in the course of history. One day people will succeed in emancipating themselves as full human beings in community. They will no longer need the heaven of religious idols nor the heaven of political idols. Human being will be the highest being.

Though the Hegelian vocabulary may cause some difficulties, the point of Marx' critique can be easily understood on the basis of our own experiences. We only need to listen to the speeches of political leaders from the platforms and to analyse their exhortations on Independence Day and Republic Day to understand what is meant. There people are addressed as members of one nation, called upon to work together in unity for the common good, etc., etc. But in down-to-earth reality they experience only the struggle for survival against each other, class against class, caste against caste, one individual against the other. The Father of the Nation and the heroes of the independence struggle serve to project a commonness which does not exist in reality.



This is what the young Marx called alienation.

The later Marx developed his critique of the state in a less philosophical way, but the notion of alienation appears again when he speaks of the bureaucracy and we find it when Engels defines the state as a "power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it".<sup>77</sup>

b. *The connection of state and society*

The approach of the early Marx as discussed in the previous section took up the problems as posed by Hegel. Focussing on the dichotomy of state and society he criticised Hegel that he failed to really bridge the gap. His approach changes with the discovery of the materialist conception of history. In "German Ideology", the first study in which this concept is worked out, Marx starts raising different questions about the state. His concern is no longer the gap between state and society, but their *connection*. He starts discussing how the state originates in society, is part of it, and can be understood only in connection with it. Just as he had asked for the roots of religious alienation in society, so he now traces the origins of political alienation in the historical development of society.

*"The social structure and the state are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, however, of these individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they actually are, i.e. as they operate, produce materially and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will".<sup>78</sup>*

How does the state evolve out of the social process? The Italian scholar L. Basso describes the process as seen by Marx in four stages. It begins with the division of labour (1). This leads to alienation (2). The bearers of special functions, meant to serve the common interest, appear no longer as the united power of the community, but as an alien power outside of it. This is followed by usurpation (3), when the bearers of political power usurp more and more control of social life,<sup>79</sup> and turn their private interests into the general interest. They become the ruling class which uses political power for its class interests. One of the main forms of this pursuit of class-interest by the ruling class is the political repression of other classes (4), in order to maintain the social status-quo. It is because of this class-character of the state that all political struggles in fact are struggles of the different classes for domination including control of state power.<sup>80</sup>

This critical theory of Marx which exposes the class-basis of the state



is directed against all theological and philosophical mystification of the state, as something eternal coming from heaven or as the beneficial order which equally serves the interests of all, etc. Marx demythologises such metaphysics of the state by saying that the state is a means of force, an instrument of power, which is developed and used in the course of history by successive ruling classes for their particular purposes. The state is neither divine nor neutral, but an institution which serves the rule of one class over others. However, it is important to see the state not too simply as an instrument in the hands of the ruling class. It is not produced by one class but by class-society as a whole. And it serves the ruling class not by exclusively catering to its needs, but by maintaining, by helping to reproduce society as a whole as it is. That reproduction of society as a whole serves the ruling class and keeps it in its position.

That the state is geared to maintain the system as a whole can be seen from the political conflicts between various factions of the ruling class or between ruling classes which have come to share power. The state serves to mediate such conflicting interests among the ruling sections. Eventually it restricts one or the other for the sake of the system as whole. This function of *mediation* between various factions is pinpointed at in the famous formulation of Marx:

*“The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”*<sup>81</sup>

Industrialists may lobby for a total ban on strikes and for taxation of rural wealth, rich farmers may demand higher prices for their products, but a bourgeois government has to mediate between these various demands and pressures. It may even propose certain measures in favour of the so-called ‘weaker sections’, even if it hurts some members of the ruling class, if it calculates this to be in the interest of the stabilisation of the system as a whole.

### c. *Functions of the state*

The theory of the class character of the state does not imply that the state is nothing more than an organ of class repression, as it is sometimes assumed. The state arises only on the basis of class contradictions, but it looks not only after the class interests of the dominant class. It also takes care of *common interests*, be it in a class-biased way. Engels makes clear in “Anti-Duehring” that the state is not simply a class plot. He sees the beginnings of the state in non-class society in the tasks of safeguarding certain “common interests” such as: “adjudication of disputes; repression of abuse of authority by individuals;



control of water supplies.... and finally, when conditions were still absolutely primitive, religious functions''.<sup>82</sup> The division of labour makes it necessary to entrust such functions of safeguarding common interests and combating conflicting interests to individuals, be it under control of the community as a whole.<sup>83</sup> These organs, created to take care of the common interests became more and more independent until this independence "developed into domination over society". He "who was originally the servant, where conditions were favourable, changed gradually into the lord" and thus "finally the individual rulers united into a ruling class".<sup>84</sup>

Draper draws attention to the fact that Engels in this passage does not ascribe the growing independence of the leading organs to the growth of class distinctions, but sees, the other way around, the rise of a ruling class as the result of the growing independence of the leading organs.<sup>85</sup> It is on the basis of the exercise of non-class functions, serving common interests, that a ruling class can establish itself and turn state power to an instrument of serving its class interests. Even so, a ruling class can stay in power only if it continues to some extent to serve common interests also. Engels speaks of the

*"fact that the exercise of a social function was everywhere the basis of political supremacy; and further that political supremacy has existed for any length of time only when it discharged its social functions"*.<sup>86</sup>

The state, in other words, was a *historical necessity*, it was not simply a plot invented by a ruling class. But as it arose in class-divided society it became unavoidably an instrument of the dominant class, also in the way in which it looked after the common affairs.

These non-class functions are subordinated to the dominant function of managing the common affairs of the ruling class and defending its interests, so that all functions of the state acquire a class character. The state takes care of transport, a matter of common interest. But the way in which this happens serves the ruling class best as every traveller can observe. It looks after public sanitation, and one needs only to compare the conditions in posh colonies and in slums to see the class bias of the public services in this respect.

#### *d. Means of coercion*

In its essence the state is "class domination based on means of forcible coercion". But that does not mean that the state prefers to maintain itself by the direct use of forcible suppression. The threat of force, army and police, is always there, but its use is reduced as far as



possible, as long as other methods can ensure the stability of the system.

*“While the state cannot eliminate force as its underlying sanction, it strives to reduce the use of force to (a) an auxiliary method of control in the short run, and (b) a **last resort** in the long run”.*<sup>87</sup>

Draper mentions various substitutes for force which Marx and Engels have noticed. First of all, there are the *moral means* of controlling people, tradition and above all religion. Engels observes how the bourgeoisie had to return to religion as a means of control, though they had initially broken off with it, promoting atheism and materialism. But as the proletariat became a threat to the bourgeois order, the bourgeoisie needed religion. They “turned pious in outward behaviour, spoke with respect of the church, its dogmas and rites, and even conformed with the latter as far as could not be helped”, because “religion must be kept alive for the people—that was the only and the last means to save society from utter ruin”.<sup>88</sup> Of course, Engels adds that religion will be “no lasting safeguard to capitalist society”. But it explains why the bourgeois state usually protects and supports established religion.

Other ideological means used by the state are falsification of history, distortion of reality. This has become very powerful in the days of mass media. Eventually racial prejudices are fostered to divide the working class, as in the U.S.A. against the black minority and in Hitler’s Germany against the Jews. Communal feelings are exploited in order to divide and rule. National feelings against an outward enemy are aroused in order to unite and rule.

A very important means of stabilising power is that of *co-optation*. Potential leaders of dissent are drawn into the system, are co-opted. That is how the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages consolidated its rule, by forming its hierarchy out of the best brains, whatever their social background. As Marx formulates:

*“The more a ruling class is able to assimilate the foremost minds of a ruled class, the more stable and dangerous becomes its rule”.*<sup>89</sup>

In India we can observe how Dalit poets are getting high rewards, obviously with a view to drawing them into the literary establishment. The whole issue of reservations may be analysed also from this angle.

Finally, in capitalist society, of course, there are above all the means of *economic coercion*. In the previous chapter we have seen how capitalism reproduces itself, and how the workers themselves contribute



all the time to the accumulation of capital and by this to the continuous expansion of the alien power dominating their lives.

Only when all these means fail, when economic pressures drive people in masses to protest, when the system no longer is able to accommodate the best minds of the oppressed classes, and when religious traditions do not block action, it is only then that the state has to resort to the use of naked force. This again may take various forms: emergency, martial law, or even surrender to a fascist movement.

#### *e. State and bureaucracy*

The "state" is an abstraction. One cannot point at one particular thing and say "that is the state". Many people confuse "state and "government". But government is only one of the various institutions in which the power to rule society is located. Milliband lists the following institutional elements<sup>90</sup>: (1) The government, (2) the administrative apparatus, (3) the coercive apparatus, (4) the judiciary, (5) local government, (6) representative assemblies. Milliband distinguishes this state system from the wider concept of the political system. The latter includes parties, and pressure groups which play a big role in the political process and of course strongly influence the operation of the state system. The same can be said of non-political institutions such as big corporations, mass-media, churches, etc. They affect the functioning of the state system, but they are not an institutional part of it, as Althusser seems to assume.

Formally the *government* exercises state power as the executive. But many ministers discover to their distress that they are powerless with regard to the administrative bureaucracy. And today we see more and more governments being more and more dependent on the armed forces. Experience has shown that it is not enough for a revolutionary movement to win elections and form a government. In Chile the Popular Front under the leadership of Allende did so, but bureaucracy and finally the army toppled them, supported by a bourgeois controlled press. They had formed the government but they had not yet captured state power as a whole.

The *bureaucracy* is an essential part of the state system to which Marx has given special attention. Without the hierarchy of officials who man and run the state apparatus the state is an abstraction. When the German socialist Lasalle was going to be tried on two charges, that of advocating "arming against the sovereign power" and that of advocating "forcible resistance against government officials", Marx wonders what the difference is:



*“The **existence** of the sovereign power is, indeed, precisely its **officials**, army, administration, judges. Apart from this its body, it is a shadow, a figment of the imagination, a name. The overthrow of the Government is impossible without forcible opposition to its officials”.*<sup>91</sup>

Hegel had idealised the state bureaucracy as the “universal” element in society which would take care of the common interests. The young Marx contends that the bureaucracy has its own particular interests. It subordinates the interests of the whole to the particular interest of its own perpetuation. In other words, the moving of the files becomes the purpose, not the solving of common problems. The bureaucracy is inclined to treat the state as its private property. Its spirit is that of secrecy and blind obedience to authority within its hierarchical framework. “Authority is the basis of its knowledge, and the deification of authority is its conviction”.<sup>92</sup>

Marx often exposed the power of the bureaucracy and its irresponsibility in running the affairs of the state. In an article written in 1853 on “The Government of India”, he asks: “Who among us is the actual governing power over that foreign people of 150 millions of souls?” Is it the Governor-General, or the President of the Board of Control, or the twenty-four Directors of the East India Company? The final power is with the English moneyocracy represented by the Court of Directors and the President of the Board of Control which can involve Indian in ruinous wars. But:

*“On looking deeper into the framework of this anomalous government we find at its bottom a third power, more supreme than either the Board or the Court, more irresponsible and more concealed from and guarded against the superintendence of public opinion”.*

And that is the “*permanent and irresponsible bureaucracy*”, the large staff of irresponsible secretaries, examiners and clerks at the India House.

*“The Oligarchy involves India in wars, in order to find employment for their younger sons; the moneyocracy consigns it to the highest bidder; and a subordinate bureaucracy paralyse its administration and perpetuate its abuses as the vital condition of their own perpetuation”.*<sup>93</sup>

However irresponsible and parasitic, and however disgusting, Marx does not assume that the state can exist without bureaucracy in the sense of an administrative apparatus. It is part of the very division of



labour from which the state originated. Marx assumes that as a rule the state bureaucracy is subordinate to the ruling class and serves as its agent. But he observes that under certain conditions the bureaucracy can play a dominant role. That was the case in the kingdoms and empires of the tributary mode of production. It was again the case in the absolute monarchies of the 18th century and of Prussia in the 19th century as well as in the Bonapartist state.

Marx hated bureaucratic set-ups with all his heart. In the Eighteenth Brumaire he speaks of

*“this executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation, with its ingenious state machinery, embracing wide strata, with a host of officials numbering half a million, besides an army of another half million, this appalling parasitic body, which enmeshes the body of French society like a net and chokes all its pores”.*<sup>94</sup>

In spite of his deep dislike he recognises its progressive role in the days of the absolute monarchy, when it helped to hasten the decay of the feudal system. It transformed “the motley pattern of conflicting medieval plenary powers into the regulated plan of a state authority whose work is divided and centralised as in a factory”. The French Revolution and the successive bourgeois revolutions of 1830 and 1848 further developed and perfected this centralised state machinery and its division of labour. This was necessary for the development of capitalism. At the same time, however, it created all the negative features which make a bureaucracy so parasitic. It had transformed the privileges of feudal lords into attributes of its power—who doesn’t know bureaucrats and state dignitaries behaving like feudal lords, as if the state is their property and the citizens are their servants—and in the process of centralisation it had deprived the members of society of their responsibility and activity in common affairs by making them an object of government activity, “from a bridge, a schoolhouse and the communal property of a village community to the railways, the national wealth and the national university of France”.<sup>95</sup> Who doesn’t know the picture of people travelling far distances to submit petitions to tahsildars, collectors and ministers to get permission for minor matters which they themselves could have done in less than the time they wasted in the premises of the bureaucracy.

Analysing another bureaucratic regime, that of Prussia before 1848, Engels makes a few interesting observations in a less known and less accessible article.<sup>96</sup> Marx and Engels sometimes characterised this regime as bureaucratic-feudal military despotism. After reviewing the



strength or rather weakness of the various classes in Prussian society, Engels concludes that no single class has yet been able "to set itself up as the representative of the interests of the whole nation". The political system was a compromise between the nobility and the petty bourgeoisie "which amounts to resigning power into the hands of a third class: the bureaucracy".<sup>97</sup> "This regime represented by the bureaucracy is the political summing up of the general impotence... of German society".<sup>98</sup> This bureaucracy was set up to govern petty bourgeoisie and peasants. As such it becomes "an unbearable fetter for the bourgeoisie" which needs to be freed from supervision and burdensome interference.

*"The bourgeoisie, therefore, is compelled to break the power of this indolent and pettifogging bureaucracy. From the moment the state administration and legislature fall under the control of the bourgeoisie, the independence of the bureaucracy ceases to exist, indeed from this moment, the tormentors of the bourgeoisie turn into their humble slaves".<sup>99</sup>*

This was a rather optimistic note. The later history of bourgeois rule shows that the humble slaves raised their head once more also in the bourgeois state.

#### *f. Abolition or withering away of the state*

Marx and Engels envisaged the end of the state in communist society. The state as an organ of class-rule will disappear in the classless society. The "entire lumber of the state" is destined to be thrown on the "scrap heap"; as Engels puts it in his 1891 introduction to "The Civil War in France".<sup>100</sup> In "Origin of the Family, Private Property and State", he expects the state machinery to be put "into the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe".<sup>101</sup> In "Anti-Duehring", he uses the biological image of the withering away or dying out of the state. In class-society the "state was the official representative of society as a whole". But the whole of society was represented by the ruling class, the slave-owning citizens, the feudal lords, or the bourgeoisie. The ruling classes needed the state to maintain the conditions of production, the prevailing set-up of society. When in the proletarian revolution, the state takes possession of the means of production in the name of society, it becomes for the first time really the representative of the whole of society. By the same act it makes itself superfluous, because a special repressive force is no longer needed.

*"State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after*



*another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not 'abolished'. It dies out".*<sup>102</sup>

Obviously there will be common conduct of affairs, planning and administration. But this will no longer be in the hands of a state which is separated and alienated from society, run by a hierarchy of special officials and based on repressive force.

To understand the point it is important to remember that according to Marx and Engels the state could become a separate repressive force on the basis of the fact that it was performing certain necessary tasks of looking after the common interests. These are the legitimate functions which will remain at the end, while the repressive functions disappear.

Marx speaks in a more dialectical way about the *abolition* of the state. The German term 'Aufhebung' means simultaneously "abolishing", "transcending", "preserving" on a new level. What is abolished and transcended is the separate existence of the state. What through this abolishing is preserved and realised is the universal principle of the state. The separate organisation of the state could not serve universal purposes, it had to serve particular class interests. The unique character of the proletarian state is that it uses state power for the attainment of universal goals. As it initiates steps to abolish the class-antagonisms, as it starts making inroads on class property, it is serving the emancipation of the whole of society. In this process the state finally becomes universal and at the same time it ceases to exist as a separate organism. The dichotomy between state and civil society is overcome. The beginning of that process Marx saw in the Paris Commune.

*"The Commune—the reabsorption of the state power by society as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves, forming their own force instead of the organised force of their suppression—the political form of their social emancipation".*<sup>103</sup>

Thus Marx and Engels share with the anarchists the goal of a stateless society. They agree also that the existing state apparatus with its huge bureaucratic machinery has to be destroyed before the reabsorption of the state power by society will be possible. That is Marx' argument in "The Civil War in France" where he praises the Paris Commune for smashing and recasting the state machine. But Marx and Engels differ deeply from Bakunin and other anarchists in



the question of the *transition* from the present society to communism. The anarchists believed in the possibility of an immediate transition. The victorious revolution would abolish the state straight away, in one mighty blow. Marx and Engels anticipated a transitional phase in which the victorious proletariat would need the exercise of repressive statepower in order to overcome the resistance of the defeated class enemy, the bourgeoisie, and in order to initiate the process of transformation. They considered this "dictatorship of the proletariat" (see next ch.) to be a necessary but passing phase of the revolutionary epoch. The revolutionary proletariat would use state power in an unprecedented way, namely for the purpose of abolishing class society instead of maintaining it. Thus it would make the state as a repressive institution superfluous.

## 6. Recent marxist theories of the capitalist state

The following is in its outline based on a survey under the same heading written by David A. Gold, Clarence Y.E. Co and E.O. Wright.<sup>104</sup> The authors classify the recent contributions to a marxist theory of the state in three groupings. (a) Instrumentalist theories start from the assumption that the state is the instrument of the ruling class and try to analyse in a systematic way the ties and mechanisms of this relationship. (b) Structuralist theories start from the assumption that the state has to be analysed as a structural part of the capitalist system as a whole. (c) Theories which emphasise the role of consciousness and ideology in the analysis of the state may be characterised as standing in the tradition of 'Hegelian-Marxist theory'.

In the heat of the debate the protagonists of the various theories may be inclined to consider them as mutually exclusive. The authors of the survey, however, rightly see them rather as complementary. They bring out various aspects of the complex reality looking at it from various angles and thus they contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the state. As marxist theories they all start from the fundamental thesis that the state in capitalist society broadly serves the interests of the capitalist class. And they try to answer the question *why* this is so and *how* this works.

### a. Instrumentalist approach

In an instrumentalist perspective the answer to the "why" question is relatively simple. The state serves the interests of the capitalist class, because it is controlled by it.<sup>105</sup> Milliband and others have contributed detailed studies to show how class interests and state policies are connected and through which mechanisms the ruling class asserts its



interests. Milliband himself takes care not to reduce the relationship to one of personal ties and emphasizes social processes which mould the outlook of the "state elite" according to the interests of the ruling class, even if Social-Democratic parties happen to be in power. Instrumentalist studies have helped to refute the claims of neutrality of many institutions in capitalist society. They have also thrown light on the conflicts within the capitalist class over the control of the state.

Popularised versions of the instrumentalist approach tend to see the work of conscious manipulation by the ruling class in every event and trend. Certain non-marxist sociologists follow the same approach, with the only difference that they detect not only the manipulation of power by the ruling class but also by the lobbies of other groups in society. Milliband, aware of what Marx has said about the independent role of the state in certain cases, has called it a "vulgar deformation of the thought of Marx and Engels" to assume that the State would act *at behest*, on direct instruction, by the ruling class. The point is that the state on its own acts on behalf of the ruling class.<sup>105a</sup> Tata, Birla and the like don't need to lay plots with the political rulers. The government has to reckon with their dominant economic role any way. But it has to take into account other economic, political, social and cultural factors and forces as well if it wants to maintain the present set-up.

While the capitalists are concerned about maximum profit and accumulation, those who are running the state are concerned about their self-interest, namely to stay in power, and about the "national interest", namely to defend the existing social order. For the sake of the latter they have to impose also taxes and regulations on capital which the individual capitalists may not like, and they may have to introduce reforms and social measures to contain protest from below.

To conceptualise this "relationship between the dominant class in advanced capitalist societies and the state", Milliband introduces the model of "*partnership between two different separate forces linked to each other by many threads, yet each having its own separate sphere of concerns*". As long as a government accepts the partnership, i.e. does not challenge the capitalist framework, it has a certain freedom of action. That is how Leftist governments can survive in capitalist countries. They have to ask their supporters to "wait patiently and obediently for socialist ministers to get on with their tasks".

Milliband applies this model of partnership also to analyse the relationship of State and working class in socialist countries. Obviously state power has not become class power, as Marx and Lenin expected when they spoke of the "dictatorship of the proletariat". Class power



has become very much subordinated to state power. Instead a complementary relationship would be the thing to aim at. It would require organs of popular representation and democratic control to enhance the exercise of real power by the working class. But at the same time state would continue to exist. It would not "wither away", but function as mediator between the fractions of the new hegemonic class, safeguard the human rights of the citizens, etc.

*b. Structuralist approach*

The structuralist approach is not easy to present. In a limited sense an analysis based on political economy such as Baran and Sweezy have given can be understood as structuralist. It understands state policies almost exclusively as a response to economic contradictions in the capitalist system.<sup>106</sup> The authors of the survey call it "economic structuralism", as it pays attention only to the economic aspects of capitalist society.

The most full-fledged structuralist-Marxist analysis of the capitalist state has been presented by Nicos Poulantzas in a number of studies.<sup>107</sup> His language as that of all structuralists is complex and rather abstract, and the internal French debate is difficult to follow for outsiders, but the questions he raises are closely related to concrete political problems and perspectives. Especially the 1978 book takes up issues which are relevant for any left Front coming to power in a society whose state institutions have been shaped by capitalist structures.

Poulantzas sets marxist theory the task to explain why the state in capitalist societies takes certain forms and not others. Why did the bourgeoisie develop the modern representative state and the Welfare state, why is this state nowadays becoming more and more authoritarian, why are there such other forms as the fascist state, military dictatorship, Bonapartism, etc. The answers cannot be found by identifying the people who run or control the various state institutions. What is needed is an analysis of the structures of society, the level of capitalist development and the forms of class struggle. Such an analysis has to identify the various contradictions in capitalist society. That provides the key to understanding the changing forms and functions of the capitalist state which has the basic task to keep capitalist society as a whole going and which therefore has to check the various contradictions preventing that they would blow up the system.

The crucial contradiction in capitalist society according to Marx is that between the ever increasing social character of production and the continuing private appropriation of the surplus product. This



contradiction produces two threats to the system. On the one hand there is the threat of working-class unity, growing on the basis of collective production processes; on the other hand there is the threat of capitalist-class disunity, as the capitalists compete among each other for their share of the surplus. Poulantzas elaborates how the capitalist state has the function to counteract these two threats. It has to *divide the working class* and to *unite the capitalist class*.

The unity of the working class is counteracted by a process of *atomisation*. This process is grounded in the atomisation that takes place in the capitalist division of labour. Look at the conveyor belt. Bourgeois democracy and law back it up on the political and ideological level by treating everybody as individual citizens having equal rights and chances. Look at the people queuing up to cast their vote or to apply for social benefits. The modern family, the modern school, modern town planning provide further illustrations of this process of privatisation and atomisation which is promoted by the modern capitalist state. In pre-capitalist societies birth decided to which caste, estate or class one belonged. In the open class system of capitalist society the state assigns which individuals will belong to which classes. It channelizes them through school system, army, recruitment policies for state administration (reservation policies), etc.<sup>108</sup> Poulantzas shows dialectically how the same process contains the seeds of the growing power of the state which over against these isolated private individuals presents itself as the integrated, universal interest of society as a whole. And he argues that modern totalitarianism of the state exactly is based on this atomising separation of public and private.<sup>109</sup>

The Capitalist state counters the other threat of disunity among the deeply divided capitalist class with all its fractions by defending the long-term interests of the class as a whole. In order to perform this function the state needs a “relative autonomy” from the various fractions (not from the economy as a whole). These fractions are organised in a “*power bloc*”—a concept taken from Gramsci—a political coalition under the domination of a particular hegemonic fraction, as for example, at present monopoly capital.

The state organises the dominant class in a particular way, depending on the strength of the dominant fraction. As such it is involved in the class struggle and plays a crucial role in it. Often the role of the state in the class struggle has been seen only as that of repressive force—which it certainly is—and as the instrument of ideological control—which it also certainly is. But Poulantzas emphasises that the



contribution of the state reaches much farther. The modern state intervenes in all areas of life, transforming it, re-organising it, creating new realities by its policies. It depends on the level of capitalist development and the intensity of class struggle how these interventions are undertaken.

Poulantzas distinguishes three forms of state corresponding to the phases of capitalist development: the liberal state of liberal capitalism, the interventionist state of earlier monopoly capitalism, the present-day authoritarian statism. Apart from that he distinguishes three exceptional forms of state which emerge in response to a deep crisis of the system: fascism, military dictatorship and Bonapartism.<sup>110</sup> Such differences can be explained only if the state is understood not as a ready-made instrument, but as the "condensation of a relationship of forces". The relative strength of social forces changes in the course of time and of struggles. Accordingly the forms of state change.<sup>111</sup> It is crucial for any political strategy of the left to be able to make such distinctions as that between fascism and military dictatorship, or also between for example a parliamentary-democratic State in Sweden and the presidential state in France.

The approach of Poulantzas demands flexibility. The relationship of forces is changing, thus is the State. Accordingly the Left has to change its policies. The state is not a fixed thing, a dead tool used by the dominant class against a passive mass of subdued people. Nor is it a monolithic bloc which can impose its policies as it likes. The *changing forms* of the state and its policies are the outcome of conflicting tendencies within the ruling bloc and of the ongoing class struggle between it and the dominated classes.<sup>112</sup> It is also mistaken to think that the state is a completely united mechanism, a smoothly functioning hierarchy where power flows without interruption from top to bottom. There are in the state apparatus all sorts of fiefs, clans, factions, and intersecting power networks, often working at cross purposes. That means, it would be a dangerous illusion for the Left to assume that it only needs to capture power at the top of the pyramid in order to control power. Either it may fail to control the key institutions through which the power of the bourgeoisie continues to be exercised. Or the bourgeoisie may shift its power and play its game through another state institution, like for example the law courts blocking nationalisation.<sup>113</sup>

The theoretical framework of Poulantzas also makes it possible to analyse the internal divisions of the state personnel.<sup>114</sup> As the modern capitalist state interferes in more and more areas of life, more and



more popular struggles are directly or indirectly aiming at the state, and this effects the state personnel which is increasingly getting politicised. In terms of class orientation one has to distinguish—according to the social division of labour—between the upper reaches of the bureaucrats who are affiliated to the bourgeois class, independently of their individual class origin, and the intermediate and subaltern rank and file state employees who are affiliated to the petty bourgeoisie. The upper ranks are mainly affected by the conflicts within the dominant class. Some of them may get disgusted and politicised by the growing dominance of monopoly capital. More important is the fact that the lower ranks are getting affected by popular struggles and turn to the left.

However, as the structuralist approach demands, one should not rely upon that. A leftward shift of sections of the state personnel or a replacement of state personnel in case of a Left Front coming to power is not enough. The relation of the State to the popular masses itself has to be changed. So far the popular masses are excluded, no longer on the base of the divine rights of the rulers, but on the basis of social division of labour, and the State personnel is inclined to accept that. They may aspire to a better deal within the apparatus or to a different policy, but they will not easily come to see that it is not enough if leftist technocrats and bureaucrats take over. This is rooted in the capitalist division of labour. Marx has analysed how the manual worker in the factory is confronted with science and technology in the service of capital, excluding him from the intellectual part of the production process. Similarly the popular masses are excluded from the state which has taken science and technology in its service. Actually the legitimacy of the state is more and more based on scientific expertise. The state establishes a monopoly of knowledge over against the masses.<sup>115</sup> It would not be enough if the Left would take over the monopoly. The point would be to break it.

The theoretical importance of Poulantzas' approach is that it does away with a mechanical base-superstructure model, by showing that the state is not only a repressive and ideological instrument serving reproduction of the capitalist relations of production. It is itself deeply rooted in the relations of production and has a much wider function in constituting and reproducing them. Poulantzas sees the capitalist state in the framework of the social division of labour. In this way he also differs from the usual explanations which link the capitalist state to the sphere of the market and its need for a certain legal system which protects private property, etc.



## c. Gramsci

The third grouping in the survey of recent contributions to a marxist theory of state is characterised by the heading "Hegelian-marxist perspectives". However, the authors give only a short summary of this type of approach which places great emphasis on the role of ideology in the stabilisation of the state. The state serves the interests of the dominant class but it presents itself as serving the nation as a whole. The question is how it is able to do so.

The most important marxist theoretician mentioned under this heading is the Italian communist *Antonio Gramsci* (1891-1937). He developed his theory first in the thick of the revolutionary upsurge of the workers of Turin in 1919-20 as theoretician and organiser of the factory councils movement, then as leading member and later general secretary of the Communist Party of Italy in the years 1921-1926, that is in the time of the conquest of power by fascism under the leadership of Mussolini, and finally as a prisoner of the fascist state (1926-1937), slowly tortured to death by various illnesses caused by his imprisonment. He wrote his articles for "Ordine Nuovo" (New Order) the organ of the Factory Council movement and his "Prison Notebooks" long ago. But his contribution can rightly be discussed in the context of more recent debates, because his insights have influenced today's theoreticians to a great extent. Again this is not a matter of academic interests. The Communist Party of Italy claims the authority of Gramsci, one of its founders, for its disputed "euro-communist" course. Others contest this and present Gramsci as an "orthodox" Leninist. Again others see in him the thinker who has revised marxism by giving primary importance to the realm of superstructures. This complicated debate around the interpretation of Gramsci cannot be presented here. I proceed assuming that Gramsci should not be approached either as a secret idealist or as an orthodox leninist or as an early euro-communist. He has to be understood in his own terms. He was a marxist communist who deeply appreciated the crucial significance of lenin. But he understood Lenin on the basis of his own experience with the factory councils and in the context of the specific situation of Italian society. And he pursued new questions which had been neglected by marxist theory so far.<sup>116</sup>

In a letter from prison (1931), Gramsci speaks of his "desire to deepen the concept of the State".<sup>117</sup> To this deepening he contributed with his reflections on the *hegemony* which a ruling class exercises and on the crucial role of the "intellectuals" in that. Gramsci is not satisfied with a definition of State as dictatorship only. Force and repression



alone cannot explain how a ruling class exercises and maintains its power. There is not only coercion by the legal apparatus of the state, there is also the more subtle persuasion that wins "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group".<sup>118</sup> A ruling class rules not only with the force of police and army, but also on the strength of its ability to provide leadership which is voluntarily accepted by other, subaltern, subordinate classes of society. This leadership Gramsci calls "hegemony". Thus he distinguishes

*"two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government".<sup>119</sup>*

In his further analysis of the relationship of "state and civil society", Gramsci starts speaking of the "integral State" which comprises both, dictatorship and hegemony.<sup>120</sup> "State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules".<sup>121</sup> State seen as political society plus civil society, is in other words "hegemony protected by the armour of coercion". The future communist society would then be a society in which the coercive element of the State withers away and a regulated society based on consent appears.<sup>122</sup>

Comparing the successful bourgeois Revolution in France (after 1789) with the problems of the Italian struggle for an united state (Risorgimento), Gramsci takes the Jacobins, the most radical fraction of the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution under the leadership of Robespierre as a model of a hegemonic group. They did not fight only for their own narrow "corporate" interests, but they acted as a leading elite which saw "the bourgeoisie as the hegemonic group of all the popular forces". They had more in mind than the immediate needs and aspirations of the bourgeois individuals of that time, "they also represented the revolutionary movement as a whole", including future needs and the needs of "all the national groups which had to be assimilated".<sup>123</sup> With their radical demands they got the support of the urban masses. With their agrarian policy they won over the peasantry in the provinces and thus established "the hegemony of Paris" over



rural France. They did more than conquering power and organising a bourgeois Government. "They created the bourgeois State, made the bourgeoisie into the leading, hegemonic class of the nation, in other words gave the new State a permanent basis and created the compact modern French nation".<sup>124</sup> The limitation of their hegemony became visible when they refused to concede to the workers the right of combination. This undermined their leadership of the Paris urban forces and led to the establishment of a military dictatorship under Napoleon I.

In order to identify a hegemonic class, Gramsci distinguishes three levels in the analysis of the "relation of forces": the relation of social forces, of political forces, and of military forces. a) The level of social forces is closely linked to the basic economic structure which determines the emergence of various classes. b) The relation of political forces depends on the "degree of homogeneity, self-awareness, and organisation attained by the various social classes". This may be limited to an economic-corporate level as long as there is only the solidarity of the homogeneous professional group, for example, of merchants. It is more advanced if the solidarity includes all the members of a social class, be it still only in the economic field. The highest stage is reached when a social group becomes aware that its own corporate interests "transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too". That is the "decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures", that is the point where a party comes into being and eventually leads to the hegemony of a fundamental social group.<sup>125</sup> By this Gramsci does not deny that the State is the organ of one particular class serving its maximum expansion.

*"But the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the 'national' energies".*<sup>126</sup>

The insight that the strength and stability of the state depends to a large extent on its hegemony in civil society leads Gramsci to the discovery of some specific characteristics of the modern bourgeois State. Every form of State plays a role in *education* corresponding to the needs of economic development and thus of the ruling classes. This happens positively through schools and negatively through courts, and furthermore through all sorts of channels of cultural and other activities.<sup>127</sup> However, the bourgeois class has brought a deep with his on the crucial with a definitional change in the concept of this educational function of the



State. The previous ruling classes operated as a closed caste, and education aimed at making people accept their place in the hierarchical order of society. The bourgeois revolution proclaims equality of all citizens before the law.

*"The bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level. The entire function of the State has been transformed: the State has become an 'educator', etc."*<sup>128</sup>

But of course, it reaches its limits, it cannot assimilate the whole society, and it has to fall back upon force. But in the process the modern State has extended its role on an unprecedented scale. It permeates the whole of civil society. This very complex structure of civil society in the most advanced States is much more resistant against economic crises. "The superstructures of civil society are like the trench-systems of modern warfare".<sup>129</sup> These states cannot be taken in storm, as the Tsarist state in 1917. Another revolutionary strategy is required.

Gramsci devotes special attention to the "intellectuals" as the personnel, the deputies, through which a dominant class exercises its social hegemony and runs its political government. Basically "all men are intellectuals", he asserts, "but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals".<sup>130</sup> He divides those who have these functions into two basic categories: traditional and organic intellectuals. Every fundamental class which fulfills an essential economic function, with the exception of the peasantry, creates its own "organic" intellectuals who give it "homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields".<sup>131</sup> The capitalist entrepreneurs, for example, create the industrial technicians, political economists, lawyers, etc. which they need. But every new rising class, such as the bourgeoisie, is also confronted with traditional intellectuals, i.e. with categories of intellectuals already existing and representing a continuity with the past. The ecclesiastics of the Catholic church, for example, were the organic intellectuals of the landed aristocracy in feudal society, but they are a category of traditional intellectuals in bourgeois society.<sup>132</sup> In order to achieve hegemony the new rising class has to "assimilate and to conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals". In this it will succeed best if it is able to develop simultaneously its own organic intellectuals.<sup>133</sup>

The hegemony of the ruling class is not only a matter of political leadership, but also of ideological, cultural, moral leadership. Gramsci sees hegemony as the ability of a leading class to unite other, subaltern



classes in spite of serious class-contradictions around itself, to form an united “*historical bloc*” of social forces on which it can base its rule. A hegemonic class is a class which through its politics, its ideology and its culture is able to keep such a bloc together. Subaltern classes may feel uneasy, may act occasionally in protest, but as long as they are still under the spell of the prevailing ideas and values of the ruling class they will be unable to break free and pose a revolutionary challenge. Gramsci had the experience of the revolutionary upheaval of 1919-20. The hegemonic apparatus of the ruling class had broken down. A revolution seemed to be possible. But the working class was not yet ready to establish its hegemony over the uprooted and disoriented masses.<sup>134</sup> Occupation of factories did not lead to a revolutionary breakthrough, because the minds of too many were still occupied by the ideas and habits of the bourgeois society, or simply disoriented. The political leadership of the working class, its intellectuals, organised in the Socialist Party, was actually “petty-bourgeois” in its orientation, isolated in its bureaucratic apparatus, believing in petty reforms and eloquent speeches in parliament while the proletariat was involved in a historical struggle.<sup>135</sup>

The defeat of 1920 was followed by the experience of fascism whose victory and consolidation was not only based on the ruthless use of violence and terror against the Left, and on the support of big capital, but also on its ability to conquer the minds and hearts of the disoriented petty-bourgeois masses, especially of the peasantry. These experiences taught Gramsci the lesson of the crucial importance of *culture and ideology*, of the battle for the minds of the people in the struggle against capitalism and for socialism.

A mechanistic (mis)-understanding of marxism reduces ideology, culture, morality, etc. to a particular class-base, explaining that this or that are bourgeois or petty-bourgeois ideas, values and so on. The point of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is to recognise the fact that the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas, as Marx put it in “German Ideology”, and therefore are also the ideas of the subaltern masses. A hegemonic class shapes the outlook not only of its own class but of the nation which it leads. It forms a national popular culture. If its intellectuals function properly there is a communication of the leading ideas through all sorts of channels, of schools and media, popular magazines, films and songs, down to the popular masses.

That was the strength of the Catholic Church with its sophisticated thinkers at the top, and its various layers of intellectuals down to the village priest teaching catechism to illiterate villagers. That was the



strength also of the bourgeois revolution whose ideas were spread by writers who created a popular national literature.

Gramsci warns not to underestimate the power of “*historically organic ideologies*”, ideologies which cement a historical bloc, simply because they belong to the superstructure. To the extent that they are “*historically necessary*”, they have a ‘psychological’ validity, “they organise human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc”.<sup>136</sup> He reminds of Marx speaking about the “solidity of popular beliefs” which may have the same energy as a material force.<sup>137</sup> This applies, however, only to the ideologies which are organically connected with the masses, not to the petty ideas of isolated intellectuals or to dogmatic systems of absolute truths.

Gramsci owes much to Lenin and his concept of the hegemonic role of the party. But in his analysis of the role of culture he goes beyond him. Lenin was thinking more in terms of political leadership rallying all oppressed masses under the leadership of the vanguard of the proletariat, establishing alliances such as that of workers and peasants. But Gramsci thinks of a hegemonic ideology and culture that creates a deeper unity of a historical bloc.

*“An historical act can only be performed by ‘collective man’, and this presupposes the attainment of a ‘cultural-social’ unity through which a multiplicity of dispersed wills, with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim, on the basis of an equal and common conception of the world”.*<sup>138</sup>

Gramsci developed his concepts of hegemony, historical bloc, and intellectuals in the context of concrete historical analysis of bourgeois society in Italy and other countries. But it is clear that they imply important questions for revolutionary strategy elsewhere also.

## NOTES

1. Selected Works 1, 24.
2. Capital III, 792.
3. “The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx”, ed. by Lawrence Krader, Assen, 1972.
4. Selected Works 3, 191-334.
5. Quoted by Engels at the end of his book, *ibid.*, 334.
6. *ibid.*, 330.
7. See Wielenga, Marxist Views on India, *op. cit.*



8. One of the books from which he took excerpts was that of John Budd Phear, *The Aryan Village in India and Ceylon* (1880). Marx took note of many details while criticising the theoretical framework of Phear: "This ass Phear calls the constitution of the village feudal." quoted from the German ed.
9. See *Sel. Works* 3, 256.
10. For further characteristics, see Engels, *ibid.*, 257 ff.
11. *ibid.*, 266 f.
12. *ibid.*, 275.
13. For details, see Engels, *ibid.*, 275 ff.
14. *Capital* I, 309.
15. Engels, *op. cit.*, 328.
16. *ibid.*, 307 ff.
17. *ibid.*, 312 ff.
18. Morgan had divided early history into the successive periods of savagery, barbarism and civilisation. The emergence of the state is located in the transition from barbarism to civilisation. See Engels, *ibid.*, 209.
19. *ibid.*, 315.
20. *ibid.*, 328 f.
21. Preparatory draft for Anti-Duehring, quoted in Hal Draper, *Karl Marx' Theory of Revolution*, Vol. 1, State and Bureaucracy, Monthly Review Press, 1977, 547.
22. This will be based mainly on the book of H. Draper mentioned in the previous note.
23. cf. H. Draper, 556 ff.
24. Draper, 550.
25. Irfan Habib however points out that in the village community only the upper stratum mattered: "The Peasant in Indian History", in: *Social Scientist* 118, March 1983, 42 f.
26. Draper, 553.
27. *Capital* I, 481.
28. *Capital* III, 790 f.
29. Draper, 570.
30. See the quotation of Nikiforov, 1965, in Draper, 631.
31. For the whole passage, see *Capital* III, 791.
32. London, NLB, 1974.
33. *Grundrisse*, 97.
34. Anderson, 128.
35. Anderson, 130 f.
36. Anderson, 182-3.
37. *Coll. Works* 3, 165.
38. See "Decay of feudalism and Rise of National States", in: *The Peasant War in Germany*, Moscow, sec. rev. ed., 1965, 178 ff.
39. *ibid.*, 183 f.
40. *ibid.*, 188.



41. Coll Works 5, 195.
42. Coll Works 6, 65.
43. The interpretation of the absolutist state as a state with a relative autonomy based on the power balance between feudal and bourgeois forces is criticised by Perry Anderson in his study: *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London, NLB, 1974.
44. Sel. Works 1, 111.
45. Civil War in France Sel. Works 2, 218.
46. Sel. Works 3, 26.
47. Marx/Engels, On Britain, 423; quoted in S. Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Cambridge, 1970, 42.
48. See Bharat Patankar/Gail Omvedt, "The Bourgeois State in Post-Colonial Social Formation", EPW, Dec. 31, 1977.
49. Capital I, 172.
50. Draper, 323.
51. Cf. also Engels' letter to Bebel in 1892, Sel. Corr., 417.
52. Eighteenth Brumaire, Sel. Works 1, 404.
53. *ibid.*, 405.
54. F. Engels, Introduction to Civil War in France, Sel. Works 2, 180 f.
55. Eighteenth Brumaire, Sel. Works 1, 454.
56. *ibid.*, 436.
57. *ibid.*, 477.
58. Quoted by Draper, 406.
59. cf. Draper, 449.
60. quoted by Draper, 454 f.
61. Draper, 451.
62. The Civil War in France, Sel. Works 2, 219; cf. Draper, 462 f.
63. The Housing Question, Sel. Works 2, 348; cf. Preface to the Peasant War in Germany, *ibid.*, 166.
64. Sel. Works 2, 166 f.
65. "The Beginning of Bonapartism" in: Lenin, *Collected Works* 25, 21 ff.
66. *ibid.*, 220.
67. "Lessons of the Revolution", *ibid.*, 237.
68. *ibid.*, 254 f.
69. The Marxist Review, March-April 1971, 382 f.
70. See "The Concept of Bonapartism", The Marxist Review, April-May 1978.
71. Anti-Duehring, 181.
72. New York, International Publishers, 1976, 1 ff.
73. For example R. Kuehnl.
74. Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Penguin 1967.
75. See Coll. Works, Vol. 3.
76. On the Jewish Question, Coll. Works 3, 154.
77. Sel. Works 3, 327.



78. Sel. Works 1, 24.
79. cf. Sel. Works 1, 477.
80. L. Basso, *Gesellschaftsformation and Staatsform*, Frankfurt 1975.
81. Manifesto of the Communist Party, Sel. Works 1, 110 f.
82. Anti-Duehring, 205 f.
83. *ibid.*, 206.
84. *ibid.*, 206; cf. Marx, *Civil War*, Sel. Works 2, 187.
85. Draper, *op. cit.*, 264 ff.
86. Anti-Duehring, 206.
87. Draper, 263.
88. Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, Sel. Works 3, 113.
89. Capital III, 587.
90. Milliband, *State in Capitalist Society*, London, Quartet, 1973, 46 ff.
91. From an article in 1849 quoted by Draper, 485.
92. Critique of Hegel's Phil. of Law, 1843, Coll. Works 3, 47.
93. Marx-Engels, *On Colonialism*, 62-71.
94. Sel. Works 1, 477.
95. *ibid.*
96. The constitutional question in Germany, Coll. Works 6.
97. *ibid.*, 79.
98. *ibid.*, 84 f.
99. *ibid.*, 88.
100. Sel. Works 2, 189.
101. Sel. Works 3, 330.
102. Anti-Duehring, 321 f.
103. Marx/Engels, *On the Paris Commune*, Moscow 1971, 153.
104. Monthly Review, 1975, 5 and 6.
105. See for example R. Milliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, *op. cit.*
- 105a. See for this and the following R. Milliband, "State Power and Class Interests", *New Left Review* Nr. 138, 57 ff.
106. See Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, N. York, Monthly Review Press, 1966.
107. See *Political Power and Social classes*, London, New Left Books, 1973; *Fascism and Dictatorship*, NLB, 1974; *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, NLB, 1976; *State, Power, Socialism*, NLB, 1978.
108. *State, Power, Socialism*, 75.
109. *ibid.*, 69 ff.
110. *ibid.*, 159 f.
111. *ibid.*, 125.
112. *ibid.*, 132 f.



113. *ibid.*, 138.
114. *ibid.*, 154 ff.
115. *ibid.*, 54 ff.
116. See A. Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci: Towards an Intellectual Biography*, Merlin Press, London, 1977.
117. Quoted by Davidson, *ibid.*, 257.
118. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited by Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith, New York, 1971, 12.
119. *ibid.*, cf. 170.
120. *ibid.*, 239 & 261.
121. *ibid.*, 244.
122. *ibid.*, 263.
123. *ibid.*, 77 f.
124. *ibid.*, 79.
125. *ibid.*, 181 f.
126. *ibid.*, 182.
127. *ibid.*, 250.
128. *ibid.*, 260.
129. *ibid.*, 235.
130. *ibid.*, 9.
131. *ibid.*, 5.
132. *ibid.*, 7.
133. *ibid.*, 10.
134. *ibid.*, 228 f.
135. Davidson, *op. cit.*, 159 ff.
136. *Prison Notebooks*, 377.
137. *ibid.*
138. *ibid.*, 349.



## CHAPTER IV

# Revolution

### 1. The dialectics of revolution

#### a. Evolution and revolution

“Marx was before all else a revolutionist” as Engels said at his graveside.<sup>1</sup> And his theory was above all meant to provide the proletariat with the insights which would help it to overthrow capitalist society successfully. Marx’s own understanding of revolution changed in the course of his life, as he gained a deeper and more concrete grasp of the dynamism of capitalist society in particular and of the historical process in general.

Developing his materialist theory Marx emphasised more and more the objective conditions for revolution. It is not enough that there are revolutionaries who want a revolution. Society must be ripe for it. Contradictions must have developed in such a way that only revolution can solve them. Then revolution becomes possible. This materialist view had been expressed already in the “Manifesto of the Communist Party”. But in the turmoil of the revolutionary years 1948-49, Marx and Engels got for a short period close to some conspirational communists in the Communist League who tried to impose their revolutionary will on the historical process. Soon Marx and Engels break with them saying:

*“The materialist standpoint of the Manifesto has given way to idealism. The revolution is seen not as the product of realities of the situation but as the result of an effort of will”.*<sup>2</sup>

The materialist conception of history provides insight into the logic of historical and social developments, into the contradictions which drive the process forwards. Revolutions are not isolated, spontaneous and irrational eruptions, but part of the total process of historical evolution. Marx analyses them in the framework of the dialectical interaction between the *forces of production and the relations of production*, as we have seen already in the discussion of his famous “Preface to the Critique of Political Economy”



*“At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production... From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution”.*<sup>3</sup>

A period of evolution, of development of productive forces, is followed by a period of revolution, in which old conditions are abolished and new conditions for further development are created. In the womb of society new forces grow and at a certain point the womb of the old society can no longer foster further growth. The new has to come into its own, it is born. Revolutions deliver the new which has matured in the old. The way in which this happens is through class struggle. The existing relations of production are defended by the ruling class of the old society. They are challenged and changed by the rising class whose power and outlook is based on the new productive forces which it develops.

That is how Marx and Engels describe the bourgeois revolution in the “Manifesto of the Communist Party”. In the womb of feudal medieval society a new class emerges, the bourgeoisie. The burghers of the towns, merchants, initiate discoveries and develop world-wide trade. They open new markets which require a new form of industrial production. The medieval guilds make place for the manufacturing system, which in its turn is replaced by modern industry. A new industrial middle class is born, the industrial capitalists, the modern bourgeoisie. Its development was hampered by the feudal relations of production with serfdom in agriculture and guild-system in industry, and with the landowning nobility and church controlling power and enjoying privileges. It needed freedom of trade, free competition based on private property, and it needed political power to establish that freedom. The bourgeoisie as the rising new class in the old feudal society made inroads on the prevailing system, and created already new conditions in the new urban communes till it finally conquered political power and established the modern representative state. The bourgeois democratic state guarantees the new capitalist relations of production and is thus the appropriate form for its rule. This conquest of political power happens in the bourgeois democratic revolution. It is the political culmination of a long socio-economic and political evolution.

*“The feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst*



*asunder. Into their place stepped free competition, accompanied by a social and political constitution adapted to it, and by the economical and political sway of the bourgeois class*".<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that Marx in his observations about the development of the contradiction between productive forces and relations of production in European feudal society does not take "productive forces" in a narrow technological sense. He does not derive capitalism from technological development. Actually, as discussed already in a previous chapter, capitalist development precedes the technological revolutions brought about by it. Obviously the dynamism of the productive forces is first of all the dynamism and historical initiative of the burghers of the medieval towns who no longer accepted the values of the feudal society, who expanded trade, who discovered other parts of the world, who established a "civil society" in the free enclaves of urban communes, where run-away serfs and others could find refuge and where economic activity was unrestricted.<sup>5</sup> The rising class itself is the main productive force which challenges the existing relations of production.

According to Marx the development of a particular form of society has to run its course of slow evolution, revolutionary breakthrough, and full development of its potential before making place for a new form of society. That is to say, the bourgeoisie could not overthrow feudal society when it was on the height of its power while the bourgeoisie was still weak. It is not always time for revolution. There is a time for evolution and a time for revolution. When Marxist analysis wants to serve revolution, it does this also by warning against *adventurism*, against revolutionary adventures for which the time is not ripe. One has to know whether a social order is approaching its end, whether a ruling class has exhausted its potentialities.

*"No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve"*.<sup>6</sup>

For Marx this also applies to the proletarian revolution and the abolition of capitalism. After the disappointing defeat of the revolutions of 1848, he found that capitalism had yet to unfold its full potentialities before the proletariat could succeed. It has been said by marxists like Oscar Lange<sup>7</sup> that the proletarian revolution differs from previous revolutions, because it does not come at the end of a process



of changes in society, which have created the conditions for socialism, but it has to conquer political power in order to create these conditions. In this case political revolution would precede the maturing of the socio-economic conditions of the new society. Historically this is true for the proletarian revolution which took place in Russia in 1917. But that is not how Marx expected the proletarian revolution to be. Marx indeed assumed that the new society of associated producers was growing in the womb of capitalist society.

Certainly, the pattern is different from the pattern of growth of the bourgeoisie in feudal society. "The bourgeoisie came more and more to combine social wealth and social power in its hands, while it still for a long period remained excluded from political power, which was in the hands of the nobility and the monarchy".<sup>8</sup> The place of the proletariat in capitalist society is different. It does not control more and more social wealth and social power. It does not own more and more means of production. It does not run universities or control mass media. Its position in society is such that it can "only free itself by abolishing altogether all class rule, all servitude and all exploitation".<sup>9</sup> But that does not mean that nothing is growing in capitalist society before the proletariat rises in revolution. The "historical leadership" passes from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, because the "social productive forces which have outgrown the control of the bourgeoisie are only waiting for the associated proletariat to take possession of them" in order to bring about a new order in which all members of society can participate and all reasonable needs can be satisfied.<sup>10</sup>

What is growing is first of all the proletariat itself, the main productive force. Capitalism cannot grow without bringing together the labourers who once combined will bring it to fall. As the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" puts it:

*"The advance of industry... replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers".*<sup>11</sup>

Capitalism does not only produce its own grave-diggers, it also creates the foundations of the new society according to Marx. While it itself is based on private property of the means of production, it promotes the "free development of the social productive powers" up to a point. That is the "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation".<sup>12</sup> It expropriates the petty owners. It turns the



producers into proletarians. The expropriation continues “by the action of the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralisation of capital. One capitalist always kills many”. This centralisation through expropriation means on the other hand the expanding socialisation of labour. It brings about, on an ever-extending scale

*“the **co-operative** form of the labour-process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labour into instruments of labour **only usable in common**, the economising of all means of production by their use as the means of production of **combined, socialised labour**, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market”.*<sup>13</sup>

With the development of capitalism labour, skills, technology, science cease to be the matter of individuals. It all needs co-operation, it all presupposes socialisation. But the overall control is still in private hands. The appropriation of the fruits of common labour is by private capitalists. This contradiction between the development of the productive forces (socialised labour) and the relations of production (appropriation on the basis of private property) cannot last.

*“Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated”.*<sup>14</sup>

This is done by the proletarian class, which is created, “disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself” and which refuses any longer to bear the “misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation”.<sup>15</sup>

Even before the final overthrow the proletariat is able to advance and to score partial victories within capitalist society. In his “Inaugural Address” for the First International (in 1864), Marx draws attention to two such victories, the carrying of the Ten Hours’ Bill in England and the successes of the co-operative movement. The legal restriction of the hours of labour to ten hours is not only a great practical success, Marx said, but “the victory of a principle”; “it was the first time that in broad daylight the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class”.<sup>16</sup> The political economy of the capitalists adheres to the “blind rule of the supply and demand laws”. This blind rule has now been limited according to the principles



of the political economy of the working class which say that social production needs to be controlled by social foresight.<sup>17</sup> One could say in addition that in this struggle the working class had conquered time for itself, lifetime and time for education and political organisation which before that was time for exploitation by the capitalists.

Marx mentions also the co-operative movement, especially the co-operative factories as an instance of a "victory of the political economy of labour over the political economy of property".<sup>18</sup> It proves that large-scale production is possible without a class of masters. Associated labour can produce on its own. However, Marx adds, this can become really successful only on a national scale after the conquest of political power by the working class.<sup>19</sup> It has been commented that these positive remarks of Marx about the co-operative movement were a tactical concession to the sections in the International which strongly supported it. Indeed Marx did not believe that co-operatives could bring about a revolutionary transformation of society, but he appreciated them as signs of the new within the framework of the old society.

In a chapter of "Capital" Vol. 3, written in the same period of 1864-65, Marx discusses two forms in which the capitalist mode of production is in the process of abolishing itself, and producing forms of transition to the associated mode of production, namely in the negative form of stock-companies and in the positive form of co-operative factories.<sup>20</sup>

*"The co-operative factories of the labourers themselves represent within the old form the first sprouts of the new, although they naturally reproduce, and must reproduce, everywhere in their actual organisation all the shortcomings of the prevailing system. But the antithesis between capital and labour is overcome within them, if at first only by way of making the associated labourers into their own capitalist... They show how a new mode of production naturally grows out of an old one".*<sup>21</sup>

While the co-operative factories indicate in a positive manner how the antagonism of capital and labour gets abolished, stock-companies and credit system lead in a negative way beyond capitalism. In stock-companies Marx sees "the abolition of capital as private property within the framework of capitalist production itself".<sup>22</sup> The credit system which forms the basis of the stock-companies is also a development within the capitalist mode of production which helps to raise the material foundation of the new mode of production by accelerating the material development of the productive forces, and



by establishing the world-market. It also “offers the means for the gradual extension of co-operative enterprises on a more or less national scale”.<sup>23</sup>

Thus Marx sees the new growing already in capitalist society. It reaches from “share capital” as the most highly developed form which is “turning into communism”,<sup>24</sup> to the growth of the proletariat getting more and more united under the despotic yoke of capital. It is especially connected with the universalisation which capital brings about.

Meanwhile capitalism has continued to exist and to expand far beyond the expectations of Karl Marx. The question may be raised whether Marx still would be so positive about the potential of what capitalism has brought about. First of all, the proportion of salaried people may still be growing, but the industrial proletariat is shrinking and its striking power due to its strategic position in the production process is decreasing in the era of automatisisation and global corporations. Secondly, the socialisation of labour has taken on global dimensions. But do we see in the branches of the multinationals the cells of a new global society or rather the tentacles of an octopus-like global strangulation? Can these giant despotically organised corporations be brought under common control or do they have to be dismantled and to be replaced by structures of socialised production which are conducive to common control? What do the gigantic bureaucratic-technocratic structures of modern capitalism have to offer for the socialist future? Has not capitalism overgrown itself in a cancerous way, so that the new has to be found rather in phenomena which are developing out of protest such as experiments with alternative technology, alternative health system, alternative education, alternative forms of organisation?

#### *b. Political and social revolution*

Political revolution is not enough. That was the lesson which the young Marx drew from the Great French Revolution, the model of revolution in his days. It brought political rights, but it did not transform civil society. It proclaimed freedom and equality before the law, but it did not tackle the basic inequality of owners and non-owners in economic life. And thus it could not even realise its political promises of freedom and equality. It took time for the French proletariat to understand this limitation. Living in the tradition of the Great Revolution it was again and again looking for pure political solutions. It was inclined

“to squander its forces in senseless, useless revolts, which are



*drawn in blood. Because it thinks in the framework of politics, the proletariat sees the cause of all evils in the **will**, and all means of remedy in **violence** and in the **overthrow** of a **particular** form of state".*<sup>25</sup>

What the proletariat needs, however, and what it is bound to bring about in due course, Marx continues, is social revolution. That goes much deeper. It "represents man's protest against a dehumanised life".<sup>26</sup> In bourgeois society the proletariat is isolated from life itself, "physical and mental life, human morality, human activity, human enjoyment, human nature".<sup>27</sup> Therefore it will have to go beyond political revolution, using the political power to dissolve the old society and to clear the way for socialism. In other words, political revolution is only the necessary means for the real thing, the social revolution, the radical transformation of society.

Against other socialist tendencies Marx soon had to emphasize very much the necessities of the political struggle in the overall perspective of social revolution. Proudhon and others were propagating the view that political struggle should be avoided all together. Marx argues that as the workers get united and start acting as a class they necessarily get involved in political struggle. Capital has created a common situation for them as workers. As they reach the point of defending their common interests they act as working class against the class of capitalists. "But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle".<sup>28</sup>

Here the expression "political" describes no longer a struggle which does not touch social reality, but on the contrary it denotes the culmination of the confrontation of social forces. The aim of the struggle is a new society in which political power no longer matters, but the way to it is "a struggle of class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution".

*"Do not say that social movement excludes political movement. There is never a political movement which is not at the same time social. It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that **social evolutions** will cease to be **political revolutions**".*<sup>29</sup>

Marx and Engels underline again and again the close connection of social and political struggle. They support the fight for certain partial social reforms, not because they believe, as reformists do, that capitalism can be transformed through peaceful reforms, but because they expect that the proletariat in the course of its struggle for reforms



will become conscious of the need of revolution. Some of the reforms, such as the Ten Hours Bill, if successful, are seen as important advances, because they strengthen the capacity of the proletariat for organisation and indicate the direction of its own political economy. Other reform proposals may serve mainly the purpose of agitation. But as soon as the proletariat will have conquered political power, its main task will be to use this power exactly to implement such and other social reforms on a general scale. The social revolution will be the result of many such measures as proposed in the Communist Manifesto. The partial social struggles which could not transform society before but helped to mobilise for the political revolution become part of the overall social transformation after the conquest of power.

An illustration of this dialectical approach can be found in the position which Marx and Engels took regarding co-operatives. In the Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association, Marx welcomed the partial successes of the co-operative movement as a "victory of the political economy of labour over the political economy of property", as mentioned already earlier. However, he continued, under the prevailing conditions this movement will not be able to check the growth of monopoly, or to free the masses at large, or even only to lighten the burden of their miseries,

*"To save the industrious masses, co-operative labour ought to be developed to national dimensions, and consequently, to be fostered by national means. Yet, the lords of land and the lords of capital will always use their political privileges for the defense and perpetuation of their economical monopolies"*

The conclusion is clear:

*"To conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working classes".<sup>30</sup>*

In any case the co-operative movement should contribute to the development of revolutionary consciousness. Otherwise it would do harm to the overriding task of the working class. That is why Marx in 1865 opposes the idea of accepting aid for co-operative societies from the Prussian government. That would be of little or no value economically, and "it extends the system of tutelage, corrupts a section of the workers and emasculates the movement".<sup>31</sup> As Marx put it in his "Critique of the Gotha Programme":

*"As far as the present co-operative societies are concerned, they are of value **only** in so far as they are the independent creations of the*



*workers and not protégés either of the governments or of the bourgeois”.*<sup>32</sup>

But after the conquest of political power the time of co-operative production really will have come. It will be the task of the social revolution to organise co-operative production on a general scale.

Taken all together, revolution as understood by Marx and Engels, is not a short and sudden event, a change of power overnight, but a “process of development of the masses that takes several years even under conditions accelerating this process”.<sup>33</sup> It includes the revolutionary mobilisation, the learning process through failures and defeats, the struggle for reforms, the building up of class organisations, the political victory and the difficult process of transforming society after that. Sometimes Marx and Engels speak of a whole epoch of revolutionary struggle, stretching even over decades. The reason they give is that it takes time for the proletariat to learn and to change itself so that it gets prepared for its historical task of transforming society.

If revolution is the road to true emancipation, it cannot be brought about by a coup or a conspiracy. The exploited masses have to learn themselves how to free themselves. Otherwise they will be unable to be their own masters in the new society as well. That raises the question of consciousness and organisation. Before those questions can be considered a survey is needed of the main revolutions as they happened in history and as they were understood by marxists, focussing primarily on the role of classes in the revolutionary process.

## **2. Social forces in the history of revolutions**

### **a. Marx**

Marxist theory is meant to analyse a given situation in such a way that it enables the proletariat to make its revolution in the most rational and human way possible. Social reality cannot be changed at will, as revolutionary adventurists think. Conditions must be ripe for revolutionary transformation. Whether they are ripe has to be studied. Blind action according to dogmatic bookish preconceptions or romantic wishful thinking may lead to failure and tremendous waste of life and resources. Proper action based on deep insight in social reality, on the other hand, can help to “shorten and lessen the birthpangs” of the new society to come.<sup>34</sup>

The first part of a marxist analysis with regard to the perspectives of a socialist revolution concerns the maturity or immaturity of capitalist



development. It asks to what extent capitalist relations of production have come to dominate a particular society, and it tries to assess whether a major crisis is developing. The implications are clear. In a fully developed capitalist society the revolutionary struggle will be a straight confrontation between bourgeoisie and proletariat and the revolutionary task therefore will be to unite the various fractions of the working class. In a society where capitalism is less developed the proletariat has to decide about the various steps in the struggle and about the allies it needs.

However, the analysis of the movements of capital is not enough to chalk out revolutionary strategy and tactics. Marx did not only write "Capital" as a guide. He also produced such studies as "Class Struggles in France". Concrete *class-analysis* is the second part of a marxist study of a situation. It has to provide insight into the specific characteristics of the various classes in a particular society. That includes an understanding of their political culture and outlook which is shaped not only by economic conditions but also by historical experiences, political and ideological factors.

Take for example England in the time of Marx. From an economic point of view England was the country where the material conditions were most mature for the proletarian revolution to take place, as Marx observed in a "Confidential Communication".<sup>35</sup> Wage labourers formed the great majority of the population. Almost all production took place in capitalist form. Land property was concentrated in a few hands and peasants were no longer there. The organisation of the working class by the Trade Unions had acquired "a certain degree of maturity and universality". And yet all that was not enough.

*"The English have all the **material** necessary for the social revolution. What they lack is **the spirit of generalisation and revolutionary fervour**".*<sup>36</sup>

Marx observes in a next point regarding the Irish question that the "nature of the Anglo-Saxon worker" is "solid, but slow". And his "national and religious antipathies" with regard to the immigrant Irish workers make it possible for the English bourgeoisie to divide the proletariat "into two hostile camps". On the other hand, Marx sees the possibility of social revolution in Ireland itself, because the economic struggle against landed property controlled by English landlords was at the same time a national struggle and the people "are more revolutionary and exasperated than in England". Taking into account these various economic, political, social and religious factors Marx reaches the conclusion that the first revolutionary blow must be struck



in Ireland rather than in England. A social revolution in Ireland would happen in "outmoded forms". But it would lead to the fall of landlordism in England itself and this again would promote the social revolution there.

This example shows that even in the most advanced capitalist country the direct confrontation between bourgeoisie and proletariat is complicated by many factors, including the psychological make-up and religious traditions of the working class. Marx himself underlined especially the significance of the factor of external domination over other countries with his remark that "any nation that oppresses another forges its own chains".<sup>37</sup> This generalising observation foreshadows later theories regarding the role of anti-imperialist revolutions.

Marx himself was mainly concerned with the question of revolutionary perspective in Europe. This was already complicated enough, as the main European countries found themselves in different stages of socio-economic development. The aim was everywhere the "overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, the conquest of political power by the proletariat", as the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" had put it.<sup>38</sup> But the road to this aim, as seen in 1848, differed from country to country. It meant confrontation with the bourgeoisie in France, support of the bourgeoisie in Germany, and support of an agrarian revolution in Poland.<sup>39</sup> France had its bourgeois revolution already, Germany was on the eve of it, while Poland first of all needed its "national emancipation" for which an agrarian revolution would be a prime condition.

A closer look at the case of the 1848 revolution in Germany may further illustrate Marx' approach. The Manifesto stipulated that the Communists in Germany would "fight *with* the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, *against* the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and the petty bourgeoisie".<sup>40</sup> During his stay in Germany during the revolutionary year 1848 Marx consistently applied this approach. In his newspaper and in his other political activities he supported the bourgeois democrats in order to bring down the forces of feudal absolutism. He did not press specific workers' demands but tried to keep the democratic front with the bourgeoisie alive. This was hard to accept for the workers who had already learnt to see their main enemy in the bourgeoisie.<sup>41</sup> The strategy failed because the German bourgeoisie had likewise learnt already to see its main enemy not in feudal absolutism but in the industrial proletariat which was showing its strength across the border in France. The German bourgeoisie therefore refused to act in a



revolutionary way and to go for an all-out confrontation with the old regime. It settled for a compromise with it. And thus Marx had to revise his approach.

In the Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League (March 1850), Marx criticised the 1848 tactics of co-operation with a bourgeoisie that betrayed the democratic revolution. The proletariat had to find other allies in the struggle for a democratic state. There was no other choice than the petty-bourgeois democrats and their peasant following, social forces which the Manifesto had listed among those against whom bourgeoisie and proletariat together would have to fight. Marx deeply disliked the *petty bourgeoisie* and the *peasantry* as wavering and unreliable forces which in their threatened in-between position would rather tend to turn back than to throw in their lot with the proletariat. With their interest in the protection of petty ownership their tendency would be to retard dynamic capitalist development, while in situations of revolutionary crisis they would be inclined to join hands with the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. However, developments in 1848 showed that in the anti-feudal struggle for a democratic state these forces had more revolutionary potential than the big bourgeoisie.

It is with regard to these uncertain allies that Marx formulates the task “*to make the revolution permanent*”.<sup>42</sup> The proletariat should not allow victorious petty bourgeois democrats to settle down half-way and secure the gains of the revolution for themselves. It should keep the revolutionary process going, with dynamic demands pushing it forward

*“until the proletariat has conquered state power and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians of these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians”*.<sup>43</sup>

The way in which the proletariat should push the revolutionary process towards the proletarian revolution can be illustrated with the agrarian policy proposed in the same address of 1850. The petty bourgeoisie naturally would give the feudal lands to the peasants and help a petty-bourgeois peasant class come into being while leaving the rural proletariat out in the cold. The workers should oppose this and demand “that the confiscated feudal property remain state property and be converted into workers’ colonies cultivated by the associated rural proletariat”. Thus it would establish a firm basis for the principle



of common property "in the midst of the tottering bourgeois property relations".<sup>44</sup>

For the time being these strategies remained on paper. No revival of the revolution took place as expected and the validity of the revised strategy could not be tested in reality. There are indications that Marx after some time started considering more positively the possible revolutionary role of the peasantry. In a letter to Engels on 16.4.1856, a peasant uprising gets a crucial place in the revolutionary perspectives for Germany:

*"The whole thing in Germany will depend on the possibility of backing the proletarian revolution by some second edition of the Peasant War"*<sup>45</sup>

Marx certainly did not like the peasantry and he preferred a situation like in England where the peasantry had been replaced by agricultural workers. But he was realistic enough to recognise that they formed a majority in all countries on the European continent. Thus they had the power to wreck "every workers' revolution" as they did in France. The only way for the proletariat to counter this—and that is also what the Paris Commune should have done—is to win them over to its side. The proletariat "in governing must take measures which lead to a direct improvement" of the condition of the peasant-owner and thus "win him over to the side of the revolution".<sup>46</sup> Of course, from the very outset the aim should be to "facilitate the transition from private to collective landownership", but this should be done without antagonising him.<sup>47</sup>

The French proletariat did not win over the peasantry, neither did a peasant uprising back up a proletarian revolution in Germany. Marx and Engels started contemplating in the late seventies whether a revolution in Russia could become "the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West". In that case the archaic "common ownership of land" which was still existing in Russia could "serve as a starting-point for a communist development" without first passing through the process of dissolution as it happened in the West.<sup>48</sup>

#### *b. The Russian and Chinese Revolutions*

This Russian Revolution did not happen in time for such a possibility to be tried out, but only after capitalism got under way. All the more the Russian marxist revolutionaries in 1905 and 1917 were confronted with the problem of the role of the revolutionary proletariat in the bourgeois revolution against tsarist absolutism and of its relationship to the dispossessed peasant masses which were ready to fight for land. The Russian bourgeoisie was weak and not able to lead the democratic



revolution against Tsarism in a radical way. It was inclined to compromise with Tsarism. Naturally the working class moved into the forefront of the struggle. It provided the main weapon of the struggle: general strike. The questions arose whether it should be ready to assume power if the revolution would be successful. The Mensheviks said no: the proletariat should push the bourgeoisie to take power. Trotsky developed his theory of permanent revolution which said that the proletariat would be forced in the course of the democratic revolution to move on to the socialist revolution. Lenin took an intermediate position: the proletariat should establish a *democratic dictatorship together with the peasantry*. Since the bourgeoisie would betray the democratic revolution the proletariat had to play an active and even leading role in completing it, but it was not yet time for a socialist revolution.<sup>49</sup>

The 1905 revolution failed, ending with a compromise between tsarism and bourgeoisie. The February revolution of 1917 led to a dual power structure of a Provisional Government dominated by bourgeois elements and of the Soviets of workers, peasants and soldiers representing the masses of the people under the leadership of the working class. The bourgeois government did not last more than 8 months. In October the Bolsheviks led the proletarian revolution. Many marxists protested, among them Plekhanov, the father of Russian marxism, because this would be a deviation from Marx who wanted to give the bourgeois-democratic revolution time to create the conditions for the socialist transformation. Lenin argued that the proletarian revolution in the West could make up for the immaturity of the Russian revolution, while the support of the peasantry would give it its majority base.

In one of his last articles, five years after the October revolution, Lenin reflects once more on the question of "orthodoxy" whether Russia had deviated from the prescribed path of the general development of world history as discovered by Marx. He tells those who criticise the Russian revolution from that angle that they don't understand "what is decisive in Marxism, namely, its revolutionary dialectics".<sup>50</sup> Of course he takes care to assure his readers that the new and peculiar features of the Russian Revolution and the differences from the West-European model are within the framework of the general laws of historical development and he happily quotes Marx' letter to Engels in 1858 to show that the Russian revolution fulfilled what Marx hoped for Germany, namely, a peasant war backing up the revolutionary working class. Having taken these precautions, Lenin asks, what else could have been done:



*"what about a people that found itself in a revolutionary situation such as that created during the first imperialist war? Might it not, influenced by the hopelessness of its situation, fling itself into a struggle that would offer it at least some chance of securing conditions for the further development of civilisation that were somewhat unusual?"*<sup>51</sup>

One of the "unusual" aspects of the course of the Russian revolution was that it had to give in to the demand of the revolutionary peasantry for the distribution of land and that it could not pursue from the beginning a policy of socialisation or collectivisation of land as advocated by Marx. Collectivisation in Russia finally took place in the course of a different sort of "peasant war", namely the bloody campaign conducted by Stalin with the means of state repression against the peasantry which was unwilling to join the collective farms.

In his article "Our Revolution" just quoted Lenin also predicts

*"that the subsequent revolutions in Oriental countries, which possess much vaster diversity of social conditions, will undoubtedly display even greater distinctions than the Russian revolution".*<sup>52</sup>

This prediction came true very soon. Already in the twenties revolutionary developments in China confronted marxists with the problem of new forms of revolutionary praxis. Lenin could no longer raise his voice, but Trotsky and Stalin did. The former thought that the Chinese revolution had to be a proletarian revolution leading directly to the establishing of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Stalin, on the other hand, applied Lenin's concept of 1905 by advocating a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants. The Chinese Communist Party, in accordance with the line of the Communist International, pursued a revolutionary strategy which was modelled on the Russian experience. The cities were considered to be the key to revolution, as it had been in Russia. Several attempts were made "to conquer the cities", but they all ended in bloody defeat. This failure slowly prepared the way for Mao Tse-tung to emerge as the leader of the Communist Party and the Chinese revolution. He had proposed at an early stage to concentrate all revolutionary efforts on the peasantry in the countryside and to leave the cities for the time being. As he argued in his famous "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" (March 1927):

*"All the wrong measures taken by the revolutionary authorities concerning the peasant movement must be speedily changed. Only thus can the future of the revolution be benefitted. For the present*



*upsurge of the peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back. They will smash all the trammels that blind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants and evil gentry into their graves. Every revolutionary party and revolutionary comrade will be put to the test, to be accepted or rejected as they decide. There are three alternatives. To march at their head and lead them? To trail behind them, gesticulating and criticizing? Or to stand in their way and oppose them? Every Chinese is free to choose, but events will force you to make the choice quickly"*<sup>53</sup>

This was unheard of in marxist ears, but Mao went ahead, creating the Red Army and organising an agrarian revolution in the liberated zones, and orienting the revolutionary peasantry towards socialism under the leadership of the Communist Party. Finally this approach was accepted as the only one possible under the conditions prevailing in China.

Another innovation introduced by Mao is his concept of "New Democracy" as the form of state which would emerge in the first stage of the revolution. He envisages a joint dictatorship of all revolutionary classes. The basic forces will be "the proletariat, the peasantry, the intelligentsia and the other sections of the petty bourgeoisie".<sup>54</sup> Mao, differing from Trotsky and Stalin, even does not exclude at this stage the *national bourgeoisie*. The Chinese bourgeoisie, he argues, differs from the bourgeoisie of old Tsarist Russia. Because of the colonial and semi-colonial situation it "retains a certain revolutionary quality at certain periods and to a certain degree"—though not in a consistent and reliable way—"in its opposition to the foreign imperialists and the domestic governments of bureaucrats and warlords".

This national bourgeoisie has to be distinguished from the big bourgeoisie that serves the interests of imperialism.<sup>55</sup> Thus the Chinese revolution has to go through a bourgeois-democratic stage, but the main force in this anti-feudal agrarian revolution and anti-imperialist national liberation struggle will be the peasantry. And its outcome will be the "establishment of a new democratic society under the joint dictatorship of all the revolutionary classes of China headed by the Chinese proletariat". As such it becomes already a supportive part of the socialist world revolution initiated by the Russian October-



revolution, but the establishment of a socialist society will follow only in the second stage.<sup>56</sup>

The overall pattern of the Chinese revolution differed deeply from that of the Russian Revolution. In Russia there was a quick conquest of power based on the strength of the proletariat in the cities and backed up by widespread peasant revolts and defection of large sections of the army. Years of Civil War followed after the conquest of power. In China there were decades of Civil War before power was finally conquered at the Centre. The main social force of this protracted struggle was the peasantry led by the Communists and organised in the party and in the army and participating in the efforts of reconstruction in the liberated zones.

The example of these two greatest revolutions of the 20th century illustrates how much each revolution takes its own specific course. Both were led by revolutionaries who sought and found guidance in marxist theory. Generals use to take the last war as model for their strategic planning. Similarly revolutionaries study the previous revolution, as Marx did with the French Revolution and Lenin with the Paris Commune. Many lessons can be learnt that way, as long as one knows, as Marx and Lenin did, that history does not repeat itself. Marxist theory is essential in the analysis of the economic and political conditions prevailing. It can try to anticipate possible developments. But one has to be open for historical surprises and new forms of action emerging, such as the Soviets in Russia and the liberated zones in China.

### **3. Political forms of the struggle for socialism**

#### *a. Struggle for democracy*

Marx's critique of bourgeois democracy aimed at destroying any illusions about the fact that in capitalist society the bourgeoisie is ruling supreme whatever representative institutions and democratic rights may be there. Marx could speak with deep contempt and bitter sarcasm about the "parliamentary swindle" in certain countries. Many marxists, especially in Stalin's days, have taken this as a justification for an all-round, total rejection of democratic institutions and rights such as universal suffrage, freedom of assembly, freedom of press, equality before the law, as bourgeois humbug. This quasi-revolutionary stand is actually deeply reactionary. It is un-dialectical. It goes back to the days of absolutism before the bourgeois revolution and denies the progressive fruits of these revolutions.



What Marx criticised was the lack of democracy, what he pushed for was more democracy, radicalization of the democratic demands of the bourgeois revolution leading to the overthrow of bourgeois class-society itself. That is how the radical bourgeois democrat Karl Marx of 1842/43 became a socialist. And that explains how his followers later could call themselves Social Democrats. The utopian socialists of those days were no democrats. They proposed a socialism from above, a new order installed by benevolent leaders for the good of the masses, just like the Fabian socialists wanted it later. Marx expected socialism to be the outcome of the proletarian struggle from below. Draper claims on convincing grounds that

*“Marx was the first socialist figure to come to an acceptance of the socialist idea **through** the battle for the consistent extension of democratic control from below... He was the first to fuse the struggle for consistent political democracy with the struggle for a socialist transformation”.*<sup>57</sup>

Marx argues against the utopian approach that one should not start with raising the “dogmatic banner” of communism or socialism as Cabet and Weitling, Fourier and Proudhon did. One should bring out the “social truth” contained in the contemporary demands for a political system “based on representation” and no longer on “social estate”, as they express in political forms “the difference between rule by man and rule by private property”. One has to bring out this meaning of the representative system and thus to push its supporters further on the road to socialism.<sup>58</sup> Being involved in the political struggles of the day for democratic rights, along with bourgeois democrats and others, the struggle for socialism can be promoted.

Writing several decades later Engels describes how the “bourgeois demands for equality were accompanied by proletarian demands for equality”.<sup>59</sup> The bourgeoisie had been “the standard-bearer of the modern demand for equality”. Of course, it needed freedom and equality for the sake of its expanding trade and industry. But its “demand for liberation from feudal fetters and the establishment of equality of rights... was bound soon to assume wider dimensions”.<sup>60</sup> It led to demands for the abolition of serfdom on the one hand and of aristocratic privileges on the other side. The demand for equality assumed a general character, leading to the proclamation of “human rights”. The bourgeoisie did not intend to practise freedom and equality in such a general way, but it could not prevent that the proletariat drew “more or less correct and more far-reaching demands from this bourgeois demand”. They used the language of the capitalists



as a means of agitation against them. But the "real content of the proletarian demand for equality" goes beyond bourgeois society itself: it is "the demand for the abolition of classes".<sup>61</sup>

Marx and Engels consistently supported the struggle for democratic forms of government, not as an end in itself, but because they saw this as part of the advance towards socialism. This can be observed in the position they took in the complicated *revolution of 1848-49 in Germany*. The revolutionary upsurge had brought about a National Assembly, elected from the various German states, which had to decide on a constitution, while the monarchist regime tried to win back control over the moderate bourgeois government. There were ultraleft radicals who found it disgusting and meaningless to get involved in the politics of bourgeois democracy with elections, constitutions and the like. Marx calls this anti-democratic position the "old thesis", supported both by certain revolutionaries and reactionaries.<sup>62</sup>

Marx and Engels follow a different line. They ask, what will maximise the influence exercised from below, by the masses in movement, on the political forces above. From there they take a stand in the concrete political issues in their organ the "*Neue Rheinische Zeitung*". They urge the National Assembly to proclaim and to defend the "sovereignty of the German people", they fight for the freedom of assembly, the freedom of press, direct suffrage, the immunity of deputies, the right to organise, etc.<sup>63</sup> They did not speak of communism but of democracy only. Some communists considered this a betrayal of the cause. But Marx and Engels insisted that the struggle had to be taken up from the struggle for democracy as a starting point, and their newspaper was used to give "insight into the course of development" as it actually took place.<sup>64</sup> It was not the time to establish communism, but to defeat absolutism through a democratic revolution.

The issue of *freedom of the press* may further illustrate the approach. Already in 1842 in his first articles Marx had fervently argued in favour of a free press: "the absence of freedom of the press makes all other freedom illusory".<sup>65</sup> And he condemned censorship: "What a difference there is between a judge and a censor! The censor has no law but his superiors. The judge has no superiors but the law".<sup>66</sup> He rejected immaturity of the people as an argument against freedom of the press. Freedom is exactly what is needed to come of age. Education is not "keeping a person wrapped up in a cradle throughout his life", but letting him learn to walk and to fall. And his final argument against 'educational' dictatorships was the question: "If we all remain



in the cradle, who is to rock us? If we are all prisoners, who is to be prison warden?"<sup>67</sup>

That was Marx the radical bourgeois democrat in 1842. In 1848 Marx the communist was editing the most critical newspaper in Germany and he spoke of the press as "the only effective control" on the bureaucracy.<sup>68</sup> And Engels points out how essential this democratic freedom of the press is for the class-struggle: "Freedom of the press, the free competition of opinions—this means giving free rein to the class struggle in the field of the press". That is why the government is eager to suppress it, especially that important means of communication of the working class, "the cost-free literature of the wall posters and give away leaflets".<sup>69</sup>

The general picture arising from the stand taken by Marx and Engels in those days in concrete political issues is that they try to minimise the powers of the executive and the state bureaucracy and to maximize the weight of the representative system, of the assemblies and of the control from below. That is their leading concern whenever they comment, as they often do—sometimes in minute detail—on proposed constitutions. Whatever curtails the power of the bureaucracy is welcomed, from ministerial responsibility to independence of the courts. By pressing for maximum popular control from below they try to turn the ambiguity of democracy in capitalist society to the advantage of the working class struggling for socialism.

They know that the bourgeoisie tries to utilise the democratic forms to legitimise their rule. That is the "democratic swindle" which domesticates the masses by giving them a "safety-valve" to express their passions<sup>70</sup> and thus an illusionary sense of participation.<sup>71</sup> But the answer to that is not what Engels thought in his first year in England in the early forties, under the influence of the utopian thinkers: communism *against* democracy. In those early days he wrote: "political liberty is sham-liberty, the worst possible slavery".<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile he had learnt from the Chartists that political democracy can be utilised by the masses also. In 1844, in an article about the English Constitution, he begins to see democratic development in the perspective of socialism, because democracy is no longer the anti-thesis to monarchy and feudalism, but to the ruling bourgeoisie and private property. That means, "the struggle of democracy against the aristocracy in England is the struggle of the poor against the rich. The democracy which England is heading for is a *social* democracy". He adds, however, that this struggle of the poor against the rich has to go beyond democracy and politics. It requires socialism which transcends



politics.<sup>73</sup> It needs the complete democratisation of society, which will take other forms all together.

The contradictory character of bourgeois democracy is clearly revealed in Marx' analysis of *"The Class Struggles in France"*, in the years 1848-1850. It started with the "proclamation of the republic on the basis of universal suffrage" after the February revolution in which the proletariat had fought along with the bourgeoisie. In the beginning the proletariat had illusions about the fraternity proclaimed in the days of the revolution. But soon it had to learn the hard way that it had won only "the terrain for the fight for its revolutionary emancipation, but by no means this emancipation itself".<sup>74</sup> The terrain for the fight was the *bourgeois republic* which was the outcome of the revolution. However, the direct general elections brought a victory for the bourgeoisie. Universal suffrage did not function as a "miracle-working magic wand", but it had the "higher merit" of unchaining the class struggle and unmasking the real class situation.<sup>75</sup> Soon the bourgeoisie used its power over the state, the army, to crush the proletariat, showing that its "fraternity" meant civil war in reality.<sup>76</sup> It taught the workers that the bourgeois republic means the State which defends at all cost the rule of capital and the slavery of labour. It taught them that they need more than overthrowing a form of government, replacing the monarchy by a republic. It taught them that they need to overthrow the bourgeoisie itself and its class rule. Under such conditions of class struggle the constitution of a bourgeois democracy contains a clear contradiction:

*"The classes whose social slavery the constitution is to perpetuate, proletariat, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, it puts in possession of political power through universal suffrage. And from the class whose old social power it sanctions, the bourgeoisie, it withdraws the political guarantees of this power. It forces the political rule of the bourgeoisie into democratic conditions, which at every moment help the hostile classes to victory and jeopardise the very foundations of bourgeois society. From the ones it demands that they should not go forward from political to social emancipation; from the others that they should not go back from social to political restoration".<sup>77</sup>*

As long as the majority of the voters accepts the bourgeois rule and the interpretation and implementation of the constitution according to its interests, the democratic set-up serves its legitimation. But if a majority of people threatens to use the right of vote and other rights against the fundamental interests of the bourgeoisie a restriction of



these rights becomes necessary. The threat to the political power of the bourgeoisie became clear in a victory of the opposition parties in one of the next elections. Marx documents the repressive laws by which the bourgeoisie responded, muzzling more and more democratic rights, including finally universal suffrage. "Annihilation of universal suffrage" became the last word "of the bourgeois dictatorship".<sup>78</sup> By this the bourgeoisie confessed: "Our dictatorship has hitherto existed by the will of the people; it must now be consolidated against the will of the people".<sup>79</sup> In response to that, democratic demands gain "socialist significance".<sup>80</sup> Universal suffrage becomes the pretext and rallying point for the new revolution. And the bourgeoisie is right, Marx writes in *Eighteenth Brumaire*, when it discerns the "secret of socialism" in democratic demands, when it sees in the "so-called bourgeois liberties" an attack on "its class rule at its social foundation and its political summit simultaneously".<sup>81</sup> That is why it accepted its loss of power at the hands of Louis Bonaparte. And that is why the bourgeoisie whenever it feels threatened withdraws to more authoritarian forms of state.

On the other hand, Marx and Engels are not committed to the democratic form at the cost of the proletarian cause. The democratic republic may be good for the proletarian advance and dangerous for the survival of the bourgeoisie facing a numerically strong and well organised proletariat. But there are other classes like the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie which may use their strength in numbers in the democratic republic against the interests of the proletariat, as it happened in the first election based on universal suffrage after the 1848 revolution in France. Thus Engels reminds Bernstein in a letter that the "proletariat too needs democratic forms for the seizure of political power but they are for it, like all political forms, mere means".<sup>82</sup> The end is not democracy but the abolition of class society. Armed with a proper class analysis the proletarian party should be able to discern when "pure democracy" has become an ideological instrument of reactionary forces. They can pose in a revolutionary situation as radical democrats in order to attract petty bourgeoisie and peasantry and to isolate them from the revolutionary proletariat.<sup>83</sup>

The democratic illusions of the petty-bourgeois masses have often been exploited to the disadvantage of the proletarian cause and their own emancipation. These illusions are based on the separation of the political process with elections from the economic reality where the bourgeoisie is in control. Marxist analysis helps to see through this. But the insight that there is no "pure democracy" under the conditions of capitalism has been used or rather abused to ignore popular demands and aspirations in an arbitrary, undemocratic way, and to justify



dictatorial repression of the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie instead of trying to win them over as Marx and Lenin demanded.

*b. Dictatorship of the proletariat*

Marx's pleas for maximum control from below and minimum power from above sound too beautiful to be true. His arguments in favour of freedom of press and his penetrating analysis of the vested interests of bureaucrats are convincing till today. But how valid were they for Marx himself and how valid are they for marxists after him? Seeing the praxis of later marxists, seeing maximum power from above and minimum control from below, seeing a penetrating bureaucratism and a press curtailed by censors, the suspicion arises that Marx himself could not have been such a sincere democrat as some of his sayings seem to suggest. Could it be that his arguments for control from below were meant only for the time of opposition? Could it be that he demanded freedom for the working class movement only to enable it to conquer power and then to abolish freedom and democracy? Did he not speak of dictatorship as the aim of the struggle of the proletariat?

In order to answer these questions we have to clarify what Marx meant by dictatorship and what role he expected it to play. The "Manifesto of the Communist Party", though not using the expression "dictatorship of the proletariat", speaks of the "conquest of political power by the proletariat". It calls the "overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy" as the "immediate aim" of the communists in the class-struggle of the proletariat.<sup>84</sup> That is "the first step in the revolution by the working class" to replace the bourgeoisie as "ruling class" on the political level. If it succeeds in that, it has won "the battle of democracy".<sup>85</sup> But that is only the first step of the revolution. As long as the bourgeoisie still owns the means of production, it controls the economy and other sectors of society and has all chances to recapture political power as well.

The next step therefore has to be to break the economic power of the bourgeoisie. "The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie". It will use its political power to expropriate the bourgeoisie step by step and to bring all production in the course of a long process "in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation". To do this it requires especially in the beginning "means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production". The means of force Marx and Engels speak of are not those of tribunal condemning capitalists and landlords to death, but economic measures taken by the state.



The Manifesto mentions, for example, abolition of property in land, progressive income tax, abolition of all right of inheritance, confiscation of property of emigrants and rebels, centralisation of credit, means of communication and transport in hands of the state, equal liability of all to labour, etc.<sup>86</sup>

Political power is needed to realise this transformation of society leading to the abolishing of classes. But since political power is “merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another” it becomes obsolete, superfluous, once society is no longer based on the antagonism of classes. Class society always needs the state to keep the exploited class under control. The proletariat will use the state to abolish the class antagonism. In the process all will become workers, and thus the proletariat will have “abolished its own supremacy as a class”. In that way “public power will lose its political character”, it will no longer be oppressive, dictatorial.<sup>87</sup>

In the Manifesto, Marx also clarifies his understanding of “freedom”. Bourgeois critics of communism complain that the abolition of private property would destroy the “groundwork of all personal freedom, activity and independence”.<sup>88</sup> Marx points out that the private ownership of the capitalists is based on the antagonism of capital and wage-labour. It presupposes the loss of private property of petty artisans and small peasants, its concentration in the hands of a few, and its lack among the many who therefore have to sell their labour-power. The freedom based on private property in capitalism is the freedom of a few. It means the freedom of the market, of production and trade. It has nothing to do with personal freedom and independence. On the contrary,

*“in bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality”.*

The purpose of the proletarian revolution is to break that enslavement, so that the individual worker can enjoy his freedom.

*“In bourgeois society, living labour is but a means to increase accumulated labour. In communist society, accumulated labour is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer”.*<sup>89</sup>

The abolishing of the class-antagonism in the course of the proletarian revolution will pave the way for society organised as an “association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all”.<sup>90</sup> This shows that for Marx freedom is the final goal of communism. In the light of that goal democratic freedoms,



however ambiguous in bourgeois society, are obviously more than tactical means. Universal suffrage and freedom of expression and association are elements which anticipate and prepare the full freedom of future society. What is attacked is the freedom of private property. What is meant to come is free association. What is meant to go is the state as repressive force. That may be rather utopian, but that is another question.

In a famous letter to F. Wedemeyer, written in March 1852, Marx takes credit for having proved that a transitory phase of proletarian dictatorship is necessary. Bourgeois historians had described class struggle long before.

*“What I did that was new was to prove: (1) that the **existence of classes** is only bound up with **particular historical phases in the development of production**, (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to **the dictatorship of the proletariat**, (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the **abolition of all classes** and to a **classless society**”.*<sup>91</sup>

When we hear “dictatorship” we automatically assume that it is the opposite of democracy. But when Marx uses this expression he has in mind the opposite of a stateless society. For him bourgeois democracy is also “dictatorship”, namely dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. He expects the dictatorship of the proletariat to be not less democratic than the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in a parliamentary democracy, but far more democratic, as the first state in history in which the majority of the people will be the ruling class. But it will still be a dictatorship, because it is still a state. But it is an exceptional state, a temporary one, working at its own transformation into a form of public power which is no longer repressive.

In his “Marginal Notes to the Programme of the German Workers’ Party”, better known as “Critique of the Gotha Programme”, Marx ridicules the expression “free state”. In Russia the state is free namely to repress without restriction. Freedom consists in restricting the “freedom of the state”.<sup>92</sup> In this text Marx also clearly distinguishes between democratic republic as the “last form of state of bourgeois society” in which the class struggle has to be fought out, and the “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat” as the state in the political transition period which corresponds to the period of transformation from capitalist into communist society.<sup>93</sup> Marx assumed that this revolutionary dictatorship would lead on the road to “freedom” which “consists in converting the state from an organ super-imposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it”.<sup>94</sup>



This can be concluded from his evaluation of the *Paris Commune*, the only revolutionary state not ruled by the bourgeoisie during his life-time. Before and during the short-lived experiment of the Paris Commune in 1871, Marx was rather sceptical about it.<sup>95</sup> Ten years later, Marx expresses this scepticism by saying that it was “merely the rising of a city under exceptional conditions”, that “the majority of the Commune was by no means socialist, nor could it be”, and that the only reasonable thing would have been a “compromise... useful to the whole mass of people”.<sup>96</sup> But in “The Civil War in France”, presented a few days after the brutal massacring of the heroic defenders of the Commune and many innocent people, Marx passionately praises the Commune. Ironically it was this public defence of the Commune which made Marx known all over the world through the bourgeois press.

What Marx highlights above all are the measures and ways by which the Commune discovered “the political form... under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour”.<sup>97</sup> He saw in it in outline the characteristics of a “working-class government” which formed a “direct antithesis” to the preceding bourgeois forms of state which had culminated in the empire of Louis Bonaparte.<sup>98</sup> The bourgeois regime was characterised by “centralised state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature—organs wrought after the plan of a systematic and hierarchic division of labour—”, geared to serve as an “engine of class despotism”.<sup>99</sup> The Commune started to dismantle this state machinery. It brought all functions of public power under direct control of the people. It dissolved the standing army and armed the people instead. Its members were chosen by universal suffrage and made responsible and revocable at short terms. They had to execute their own legislation. “The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body”. The police was made responsible to the Commune. Public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible and revocable. All public service had to be done at workmen’s wages.<sup>100</sup> In these measures Marx saw a breakthrough in the revolutionary task of resorting “to the social body all the forces hitherto absorbed by the state parasite feeding upon, and clogging the free movement of society”.<sup>101</sup> Engels in his introduction (in 1891) speaks of the “shattering of the former state power and its replacement by a new and truly democratic one”.<sup>102</sup> And he closes by saying, if you want to know what the Dictatorship of the Proletariat looks like:

“Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat”.<sup>103</sup>



Marx did not use that expression. He criticised that the Commune failed to act more decisively in the economic sphere.

*“The political rule of the producer cannot coexist with the perpetuation of his social slavery. The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class-rule”*

It had to abolish “that class-property which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few”. It has to aim at the “expropriation of the expropriators”.<sup>104</sup> But it even lacked the boldness to take over the Bank of France. That failure to tackle the economic basis of the power of the bourgeoisie must be the reason why Marx in his letter to Domela Nieuwenhuis even said that the majority was not socialist nor could it be. An uprising confined to the political realm was not yet socialist for Marx. And a working class government which does not make “despotic inroads” on the class property of the bourgeoisie was not yet a dictatorship of the proletariat. And that is one of the reasons why the Commune was defeated.

This defeat underlined the thesis of Marx that the proletariat has to use state-power in a purposeful way in order to secure its victory. The Commune in the “enthusiasm of its historic initiative”, in its “incubation of a new society”, was too forgetful of the enemy which was at its gates. It was not as unrealistic as the anarchists under the leadership of Bakunin, who secured the townhall of Lyon and simply proclaimed the abolition of the state. They re-organised the state in an imaginative way, but they forgot that they had won a battle but not yet the war. The lasting achievement of the Commune in the eyes of Marx was the discovery of alternative political forms after the smashing of the existing state machinery. That discovery contained the promise that the proletarian revolution will initiate the process in which the alienation of society and state will be overcome, in which the state as an organ for repression will be abolished.

### c. Lenin, the Soviet State and after

Lenin understood himself as standing in the tradition of the Paris Commune. Already during the 1905 revolution, when he demanded revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, he saw in the *soviets* which had sprung up the new forms through which such a dictatorship could be organised. They “recognised no other authority, no law and no standards” and yet this dictatorial authority was democratic maintaining itself solely “because it enjoyed the confidence of the vast masses, solely because it, in the



freest, widest and most resolute manner, enlisted all the masses in the task of government".<sup>105</sup> In 1917 he took up the same line with his slogan "All Power to the Soviets", while the emphasis in terms of classes shifted towards the proletariat and eventually the poor peasantry.

Lenin demanded in 1917 to smash the existing state machinery, meaning the bourgeois state which arose after February 1917, and to replace it by a proletarian dictatorship based on soviets. In this way he rejected on the one hand the reformists who wanted to take over the bourgeois state as it was, and on the other hand the anarchists who believed that they could create a stateless society over night. The state is needed for a period of transition. The proletariat has to organise itself "as the ruling class", as the Communist Manifesto put it, and to use the state apparatus as "a special organisation of force" to suppress the bourgeoisie.<sup>106</sup> But this state needs to be constituted in such a way "that it begins to wither away immediately, and cannot but wither away".<sup>107</sup> And Lenin expects that this can be done in a simple way and at a low cost, also with far less bloodshed than the previous forms of state needed because it will be based on the overwhelming majority of the exploited masses.<sup>108</sup>

Lenin was also convinced that the transition towards a non-repressive and non-alienating administration of things would be possible through the participation of the masses in the administration. Capitalist culture had created the conditions for this. It has simplified the process of registration, filing, checking, accounting, etc., so that every literate person would be able to perform these tasks.<sup>109</sup> In "State and Revolution" Lenin was confident:

*"Abolishing the bureaucracy at once, everywhere and completely, is out of the question. It is a utopia. But to **smash** the old bureaucratic machine at once and to begin immediately to construct a new one that will make possible the gradual abolition of the bureaucracy—this is **not** a utopia, it is the experience of the Commune, the direct and immediate task of the revolutionary proletariat".*<sup>110</sup>

But soon reality forced him and the Soviet State to fall back upon Tsarist bureaucrats and bourgeois specialists with their technical skills to run the state apparatus, the Red Army and the economic establishments.

Lenin admitted that the apparatus was still that of the Tsarist bureaucracy, be it "slightly anointed with Soviet oil".<sup>111</sup> This may have been rather unavoidable under the prevailing conditions.<sup>112</sup>



An important point to be noted here is that the functions of the state were not limited as Marx expected to the temporary repression of the bourgeoisie but got expanded. The state-apparatus was needed not only to keep the Bolsheviks in power, but to keep Russia as a whole going with its predominantly patriarchal and petty-bourgeois economy and culture. The workers councils represented only the numerically small industrial proletariat. The vast majority of the peasantry could not effectively be organised in soviets. Moreover, the state had to take up vast additional tasks in the reconstruction of society. There was not much to appropriate from the capitalists, most still had to be created. Who else would bring about the rapid development of the productive forces but the state? Facing these gigantic tasks Lenin speaks of the necessity to use "dictatorial methods"

*"While the revolution in Germany is still slow in 'coming forth', our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare no efforts in copying it and not shrink from adopting **dictatorial methods** to hasten the copying of it. Our task is to hasten this copying even more than Peter hastened the copying of Western culture by barbarian Russia, and we must not hesitate to use barbarous methods in fighting barbarism".*<sup>113</sup>

Here a significant shift in the understanding of dictatorship occurs which under Stalin would lead to disastrous results. For Marx "dictatorship of the proletariat" meant that the proletariat was the ruling class using state power for its revolutionary purposes. The despotic means he envisaged were that of nationalisation, confiscation, etc.<sup>114</sup> For Lenin the expression "dictatorship" starts to imply dictatorial methods as used by state capitalism and Russian tsars.

In the early days there was still some degree of active control by the proletariat over the running of the state. But soon this got weakened. The best elements of the working class were absorbed into the apparatus. Many of the politically most conscious workers died in the Civil War. The disintegration of the industrial base during the Civil War led to a dissolving of the social base of proletarian soviet democracy. More and more the party had to substitute for the proletariat. And finally the "workers opposition", which tried to build up a counter-weight to the party and government bureaucracy by demanding independent trade-unions, got suppressed by Lenin's resolution on "Party Unity" adopted by the Tenth Party Congress in the crisis year of 1921. That was the year in which the Kronstadt uprising in the name of Soviet democracy was crushed by the Red Army, and in which the New Economic Policy had to be introduced. Lenin may have meant



the banning of factions only as a temporary restriction of party democracy in order to meet the emergency. But it became a permanent feature of party life and the deadly weapon by which Stalin smashed all opposition in the party. Lenin did not make a virtue of such measures. But *Stalin* promoted them to the standard criteria for true Bolshevism.

Under him the *centralisation of power* acquired a different quality all together. In the name of the party, but actually substituting for it, the supreme leader assembled all power in his hands and used it in a way which betrayed all the democratic-communistic aspirations of the workers' movement and of Marx. In Stalin's Russia we find almost everything that Marx criticised in Tsarism and Bonapartism. There is bureaucratic despotism and cultic devotion around the infallible leader.<sup>115</sup> There is not the withering away of the state, but its expansion on a gigantic scale. Nothing of what Marx praised in the Paris Commune can be found in the state presided over by Stalin. Neither can it be found under his successors after they have broken with his extreme repressive practices. Army, police, bureaucracy and judiciary are not under popular control by means of election and the right to control. There are no signs of their withering away. The officials are not part of the people, paid on a similar scale. They—at least the higher ones—live in a separate, secluded world of the privileged, the so-called Nomenklatura. Instead of the state under people's control there is a perfect system of the people being under state control.

It would be superficial to blame only Stalin for this development. But it would also be superficial to "explain" all this as the unavoidable outcome of the circumstances. One has to analyse the historical circumstances without walking into Stalin's pitfall who taught that he was implementing the iron laws of history leading to socialism. Whatever the pressures and dilemmas he had to face, one should not identify the product of his choices and policies with "socialism", as he claimed and the party with him. Certainly, bureaucratism and monolithism started already under Lenin. Lenin's theory of the vanguard party and his emphasis on party discipline in times of crisis helped to pave the way which Stalin took. But there are also big differences. Lenin fought against the omnipotence of the bureaucracy, Stalin promoted it. Lenin was never a personal dictator, Stalin was. It is difficult to speculate how Lenin would have tackled the problem of collectivisation, but one can hardly imagine that he would have gone about it in the way Stalin did. And it is certainly unlikely that he would have promoted the stifling of science, marxist theory, and art, not to speak of the terror unleashed against the Bolshevik party and millions of people.



The bloody excesses of the Stalin regime have been stopped under his successors. But the Soviet state still poses a problem to marxist theory. It is not withering away. In the contrary, it controls social life in all aspects. The alienation which Marx saw in the state can be observed in the socialist states as well. The uprisings from Kronstadt till Poland 1980 document that. The question arises what the class-character of this state is. Officially it was the state of the proletariat, or now as the new Soviet constitution claims of the whole people. But uncontrolled power is in the hands of the ruling party and government bureaucracy.

The striking phenomenon is that once more we find a rather *independent state apparatus*. It derives its legitimacy from the ideological claim that it guides the development towards communism. But it is run by a party-leadership which is beyond control from below. Nominations come from above. Neither the proletariat nor the people as a whole have control or a right to recall. Again a contradiction develops: between the producers and the bureaucrats who decide over the surplus which is produced. Kuron and Modzelewski called it monopoly socialism in their open letter to the Polish Party in 1964 and they demanded a re-organisation of socialist society which would give control and power to the producers. It is not only the bureaucracy which looms large over socialist society against the expectations of Marx. An even more disturbing trend is the increasing role of an other branch of the state: the *army*. This has become visible in Poland in a direct way. But one has to assume that the arms race between the super-powers gives more and more weightage to the military in all the socialist countries.

These developments in the Soviet-Union and other socialist countries have strongly contributed to the ideological hold of the bourgeoisie in the capitalist countries. Against the dark background of Stalinist terror and of the Gulag-archipelago in the past and of a totally bridled press, and an all-powerful bureaucracy and police, and the lack of legal possibilities for voicing protest, till today, the ruling classes in the capitalist countries can project their superficial freedoms under the over-all tutelage of big business as a model of "democracy". As long as the power monopoly of party and bureaucracy are called "people's democracy", people elsewhere may prefer "parliamentary democracy". Even the experience of fascism and the proliferation of military and authoritarian regimes in the capitalist world have not benefitted the communist movement because of its own repressive record.

Of course, the Soviet-Union is not the only socialist country and the



CPSU is not the only communist party. Developments especially in countries which had their own revolution show attempts to avoid the pitfalls of Stalinism. The *Chinese communists* have experimented with a much more decentralised set-up in their People's Communes. However, it seems that these structures are now abandoned for the sake of the new modernisation policy. On the other hand, the Cultural Revolution may have been less far removed from Stalinist practices than it appeared to be. Instead of Stalin's terror through the police apparatus and the bureaucracy there was mass-mobilisation against the bureaucracy. But later accounts indicate that the masses acting on the stage of the Cultural Revolution were very much manipulated. And the excessive cult around Mao, along with the continuing reverence for Stalin, were a clear sign from the very beginning, that this was not yet the massive emancipation of the masses which one would hope for. On the contrary, it seems that the present course—whatever its other drawbacks—allows more possibilities of expression and critical reflection which is a presupposition of emancipation.

The *Yugoslavian experiment* brought about a much clearer break with the Stalinist system. Under the leadership of the communist party they tried to revive elements of Soviet-democracy through the system of workers councils. A manager of a factory in the Soviet-Union asked whether he was elected by the workers laughed about the stupid question and answered that such things only happen in Yugoslavia. There is a high degree of decentralisation. However, the integration into the capitalist world-economy seems to undermine the advances made in the forms of political organisation. The greatest contribution from Yugoslavia may lie in the critical analysis of Stalinism, though some of the foremost thinkers—around the journal *Praxis*—have been heavily criticised by the party. These marxists have utilised some of Marx' categories in order to expose the alienation in the political system built up under Stalin. They characterise the system as "*etatism*", expressing that the state rather than society had become the organising principle and force. In order to create the conditions for a free and creative development of socialist society they plead to distinguish between the leading and the ruling role of the party. The identification of these two different things has justified the dictatorship of the party which has led to its alienation from the working class which is supposed to be the ruling class. They also point at the crucial distinction between power as capacity to transform the world and power as an instrument to manipulate people. Bureaucrats and technocrats are inclined to confuse or fuse both forms of power which is detrimental to the future of socialism.



The experience of sixty years since the October Revolution have led to critical rethinking among communists and leftist socialists in capitalist countries. Both Social-Democrats and Leninist Communists have failed to achieve their professed aims in any of the advanced capitalist countries. Recognising this disappointing outcome of sixty years of struggle, sections of the West-European Left have tried to analyse the causes of this failure, and have taken up the question whether there is a "third way" to socialism. One of the results of this process of re-thinking and re-orientation has been the new approach of some of the Communist Parties which has been labelled as "Euro-communism". This approach which is advocated especially by the CP of Italy differs from social-democratic reformism on the one side, as it sticks to the goal of socialist transformation of society with public control over the means of production and democratic economic planning at the national level. It differs on the other side from revolutionary Leninism, as it rejects the idea of a direct, violent confrontation with the bourgeois state aiming at smashing its apparatus and replacing it by another type of state. It argues that such revolutionary confrontations in the style of the October-revolution are not possible in the advanced capitalist societies. The Euro-communists plead instead for a strategy of using government power based on broad parliamentary majorities and mass mobilization in various forms and on all levels to achieve structural reforms which would transform capitalist society step by step, beginning with the curtailment of monopoly capital. They conceive socialism as the outcome of a long process of continuous democratization of economic, social and political life. And they vow to maintain throughout the process the institutions of parliamentary democracy, the plurality of parties and the possibility of opposition parties coming to power.

Critics of Euro-communism have pointed out that this strategy of gradual conquest of power and gradual transformation of capitalism into socialism forgets that the national and international bourgeoisie will not passively sit back and wait for its being more and more restricted by structural reforms. It will use all the powerful means at its disposal to try to stop the advance on any road to socialism including a peaceful third road. It will force those advancing on this road either to retreat or to fight. In other words the revolutionary confrontation cannot be avoided.<sup>116</sup> This is a crucial point. But the fact that the answers of Euro-communists so far are not convincing, should not lead to the dismissal of the seriousness of the questions they have raised. One of the valid positive contributions is the critical analysis of



what happened after the October-revolution especially under Stalin. The Euro-communists are right in insisting that the road to socialism now has to be another one and that safeguards have to be found to prevent developments like under Stalin. The conclusion that the whole concept of "dictatorship of the proletariat" has to be ditched certainly deserves critique. But then it had to be made clear all the more that this concept has nothing to do with tyranny and terror in Stalin style, that it implies a more democratic set-up and that it does allow for plurality of political tendencies as it did in the Paris Commune and in the early days of Soviet democracy. So much of critical distance to the monolithism of later "Leninism" is essential for the development of revolutionary mass movements for socialism in Western Europe.

In recent discussions some critical marxists have expressed serious doubts whether the proletariat is still in a position to provide the revolutionary leadership. Could it be that the working class is in the same danger as the peasantry of feudal society? The peasant serfs were the exploited class and the lords were the exploiters. But the overthrow of the feudal lords did not lead to the peasantry becoming the ruling class. The urban bourgeoisie came to power instead. Could it be that the working class after having done its historical duty of overthrowing the bourgeoisie has to see others, bureaucrats, technocrats, intellectuals exercising power in its name? Can this be prevented in any way? This question leads to the problem of class consciousness and the forms of organisation of the working class.

#### **4. Revolutionary consciousness and forms of organisation**

##### *a. Marx on class, party and trade unions*

A class, according to Marx, becomes a class only when it gets united and organised in the defence of its class interests. Without common struggle it is not more than a mass of people sharing the same position in the economic system. The bourgeoisie developed its class consciousness, its awareness of common interests in the struggle against feudalism. And as the ruling class in bourgeois society it understands the common need to defend the prevailing system though there are many internal, factional conflicts dividing it.

For the proletariat it is a long process of struggle to acquire the consciousness of being a class. From its very birth the proletariat struggles with the bourgeoisie, as the Manifesto points out. But in the beginning these are only individual, local struggles against the direct



exploiters, against the local capitalists. When mechanization and new forms of division of labour start destroying the skilled artisans, they may respond by smashing the machines or setting factories ablaze. They are not yet fighting the system itself. With the development of industry the proletariat increases in number and becomes concentrated in greater masses. Slowly the collisions with the bourgeoisie take the form of the collisions between two classes. The workers begin to organise themselves, they form combinations and permanent associations. The local struggles are getting centralised "into one national struggle between classes".<sup>117</sup> From the point of view of capital the mass of workers are already a class before that. But "for itself" the proletariat becomes a class only in the course of struggle. And "the struggle of class against class is a political struggle".<sup>118</sup>

In that struggle the proletariat develops and expresses its *class-consciousness*. For Marx this means basically that the proletariat comes to understand that its own emancipation and the liberation of society as a whole require the overthrow of capitalism, and that it forms the will to overthrow it.<sup>119</sup> Thus proletarian class-consciousness is revolutionary consciousness. It is the conviction that society needs to be transformed in a revolutionary way and the commitment to fight for that. Class-consciousness for Marx and Engels means the awareness of this general revolutionary perspective.

It does not at all mean, as for many marxists later, that the workers know by heart a set of marxist doctrines. In the Manifesto, Marx and Engels claim for the communists that they are not a new sect, but that "they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole". They are most advanced in their understanding of the direction in which the proletarian movement goes. But they share the same immediate aim with "all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat". In their theoretical conclusions they are expressing "in general terms" what is actually happening. They don't teach "ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer".<sup>120</sup>

This *anti-sectarian approach* of Marx and Engels determined their political practice in the First International. In a circular about "Fictitious splits in the International", they quote the rules which welcome all workers' societies as long as they agree on the common aim of "the complete emancipation of the working class".<sup>121</sup> The common programme "presents a general outline of the proletarian movement,



while leaving its theoretical elaboration to be guided by the needs of the practical struggle and the exchange of ideas in the sections, unrestrictedly admitting all shades of socialist convictions in their organs and congresses". That is the difference between the International as a "genuine and militant organisation of the proletarian class of all countries united in their common struggle" and all sorts of sectarian organisations.<sup>122</sup> A "common theoretical programme" can be expected to evolve gradually only through the "community of action", the "exchange of ideas" and the "direct debates" at the general congresses.<sup>123</sup>

Marx had great confidence that reality itself and the experience of common action would teach the proletariat the right path. He was deeply impressed by the potential of the early associations of workers which he got to know in Brussels and Paris. The very fact of their coming together, meeting, associating was in his eyes a revolutionary act. Association is practical communism. By organising itself in proletarian associations the proletariat does not only prepare itself for the struggle against capitalism, it gains its identity as the class which will bring about the new society.

That is why Marx and Engels vehemently opposed conspirational organisations. With all their secret scheming of plots and coups they would not allow this working class consciousness of the need of a new society to develop. In order to create a class out of the miserable mass of workers of those early days of industrial capitalism, the League of Communists had to come into the open as soon as the political conditions allowed it.

Marx expected the proletariat itself to develop the necessary revolutionary consciousness and to emancipate itself. That was the first and basic consideration written in the General Rules of the International Working Men's Association:

*"That the emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves".*<sup>124</sup>

The revolutionary struggle of the working class, of course, needs organisation. But as it is a struggle for emancipation it requires particular forms of organisation. Emancipation as self-emancipation requires organisation as self-organisation. The working class cannot be emancipated by a self-appointed, secretly operating vanguard as the Blanquists were assuming. It had to build up its own organisations. And it was doing so in many forms and an ever more expanding scale, from local associations in the 1840's to the International Working Men's Association of 1864.



For Marx and Engels the trade-unions of those days were the foremost forms of self-organisation of the working class. They were the natural "product of the permanent struggle of labour against capital over all aspects of the work situation".<sup>125</sup>

*"Trade unions are the schools of socialism. It is in trade unions that workers educate themselves and become socialists because under their very eyes and every day the struggle with capital is taking place. Any political party, whatever its nature and without exception (!), can only hold the enthusiasm of the masses for a short time, momentarily; unions, on the other hand, lay hold on the masses in a more enduring way; they alone are capable of representing a true working-class party and opposing a bulwark to the power of capital".*<sup>126</sup>

Marx may have given some extra emphasis for his audience of trade-unionists to stimulate them. But in any case this statement underlines the political importance of unions far beyond the respect they received from later party-marxists. This is based on Marx' materialist respect for the lessons to be learnt in social practice in daily life and for the dominant role to be played by the class as a whole.

This has to be kept in mind when Marx speaks of the need for a party of the working class. He spoke of it in a resolution of the First International in 1871, saying

*"that against this collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party".*

This is indispensable in order "to ensure the triumph of the Social Revolution and its ultimate end—the abolition of classes".<sup>127</sup>

Marx saw the party as one of the necessary instruments of the proletariat. But the basic subject of revolutionary action remained the class itself. In order to emancipate itself the proletariat cannot leave it to the wisdom of the party to show the way without fail. Through its actions and failures it has to grope its way till the decisive confrontation. Proletarian revolution is for Marx a protracted learning process, not the battle of disciplined soldiers following the instructions of a superior vanguard.

*"Proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, criticise themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course..."*<sup>128</sup>

This emphasis on the learning process of the class explains also why



Marx did not make the lack of proper leadership given by a party responsible for the defeat of the Paris Commune, as later marxists did. Engels even writes in 1885 in a piece "On the History of the Communist League" that the class-consciousness of the German proletariat had developed so fully that any official organisation has become superfluous.

*"The simple self-evident interconnection of like-minded class comrades suffices, without any rules, boards, resolutions or other tangible forms, to shake the whole German Empire to its foundations"*.

Similarly, on the international level he assumes that an international organisation might be a fetter,

*"and that the simple feeling of solidarity based on the understanding of the identity of class position suffices to create and to hold together one and the same great party of the proletariat among the workers of all countries and tongues"*.<sup>129</sup>

These occasional remarks show that the class remained the basic subject for Marx and Engels. But, of course, they were keenly interested in the working class finding effective forms of political organisation in the working class parties which came into being in several countries.

#### *b. Lenin on class, party, soviets and trade-unions*

One of the main problems of the working class movement in matters of organisation was the question of the relationship between these political parties and the other organisations, especially the trade unions. Marx wanted the unions to contribute to the political struggle but in their own autonomous way.<sup>130</sup> What happened however, was that the political struggle became the exclusive terrain of the party, while the economic struggles, deprived of their political dimension, were left to the unions. The politics and economics of the working class got separated; in spite of the fact that the unions were under party control. In the process this led to the loss of a revolutionary perspective. The unions represented the workers as sellers of labour power, bargaining for higher wages, without any more challenging the capitalist system based on wage-labour as such. And the parties got bogged down in the politics of elections and parliamentary conflicts, without challenging any more in practice the framework of the bourgeois state as such. Powerful working class organisations arose, trade-unions and parties. But they organised the workers mainly as voters and as sellers of labour-power. As such these organisations were no longer themselves forms of self-emancipation of the proletariat. In them the workers did not go beyond their subordinate position within the capitalist economy and bourgeois state, even when



they scored electoral victories or achieved higher wages. In the long run this led to the *reformism* of present-day Social Democratism.

Two alternative approaches arose in order to keep the working class on the road towards revolution and socialism. Revolutionary *syndicalism* based revolutionary action on the economic struggle of the proletariat. It rejected the party set-up as a form of organisation linked up with representative democracy and unfit to become the political expression of the working class. The working class would have to create economic democracy in direct confrontation with capital, and the decisive battle for power would be fought through the weapon of general strike.

Lenin answered the question "What is to be done?", namely in view of the revisionism of Bernstein and others, in a different way. He shifted the emphasis from the class to the *party* as its *vanguard*. His approach has to be understood in the context of Tsarist Russia where the working class was not yet strong and where no legal possibilities for self-organisation on a mass-scale existed. There were strong practical arguments for a well organised party of professional revolutionaries leading the working class and the exploited masses at large.

Theoretically Lenin could fall back – interestingly – on Kautsky, the leading theoretician of the Second International. Kautsky had forwarded the thesis that *socialist consciousness* did not necessarily develop as a result of the proletarian class struggle. Because it is based on deep scientific insight it requires the scientific capacity of intellectuals to develop this consciousness. Kautsky, therefore, saw it as one of the tasks of the Social Democratic Party to create this consciousness in the proletariat. Socialist consciousness comes no longer from inside, through struggle, but from outside, through education. Similarly Lenin assumed that the proletariat spontaneously would develop only a consciousness of immediate economic demands, and not of the needs of the revolutionary struggle for power. That required organisation and direction given by the vanguard party. In the revolutionary upsurge of 1905 Lenin recognised that the working class spontaneously was able to rise in revolution. Even so it needed the guidance of the party to advance towards the conquest of power.

However, it should be underlined that Lenin never fell back on the position of Blanqui and others who thought that the vanguard could replace the class. He was deeply concerned about an organic connection of class and party. He knew – by experience – that the history of revolutions goes far beyond the imagination of the best parties, of the "most class-conscious vanguards".



*“This can readily be understood, because even the finest of vanguards express the class-consciousness, will, passion and imagination of ten of thousands, whereas at moments of great upsurge and the exertion of all human capacities, revolutions are made by the class-consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of millions, spurred on by a most acute struggle of classes”.*<sup>131</sup>

It was this awareness which made Lenin as a true revolutionary responsive enough to recognise the significance of the organisational alternative to the reformism of a-political unions and parliamentary parties: the Soviets, the councils of workers, peasants and soldiers, created by the revolutionary masses of Russia. He tried to convince his suspicious comrades who had learnt the lesson of “What is to be done?” by heart—we need a revolutionary vanguard party—by linking the soviets with the forms of direct democracy created by the Paris Commune.

In the course of 1917 Lenin coined the slogan “All power to the Soviets!” With this demand he acknowledged the proletarian class as it had directly organised itself in soviets as the subject of revolution, rather than focussing on the party leading the class as one would expect from the author of “What is to be done?” In “State and Revolution”, written a few weeks before the October Revolution, the soviets play a crucial role, whereas the party seems to be out of sight. After the Bolshevik Party had organised the uprising and had captured power, Lenin immediately went to the Congress of Soviets in order to hand power over to it. In these early days of the revolution Lenin saw in the soviets new organs of proletarian power, not only organs of class struggle, but of the exercise of power in socialism. However, Soviet democracy did not last long. Under the pressures of civil war and tremendous economic difficulties the concentration of power took place in the top organs of the party and the government. This process which started in 1918 affected not only the role of the soviets, but also that of other forms of self-organisation of the working class, such as the factory committees. These organs of direct economic power in the hands of the workers had sprung up in 1917 bypassing the traditional trade-unions. Soon after the revolution they were deprived of their independence and placed under the control of the trade-unions and organs of the Soviet state.

The role of the *trade-unions* also became hotly disputed. In early 1918, Lenin considered the proposition that they should become “state organisations which have prime responsibility for the reorganisation of all economic life on a socialist basis”.<sup>132</sup> In his Report



at the Second All-Russia Trade Union Congress, Lenin envisages that the trade-unions as the broadest organisation of the proletariat become the chief organs through which power is transferred to the working class, through which the new class will take up responsibility "in all spheres of government, in all state affairs, in the entire business of running the new life, from top to bottom".<sup>133</sup> Formally they may remain independent organisations, but practically they should directly participate in the work of all government bodies, organise mass control over their activities, set up new bodies for the regulation of production and distribution, etc.<sup>134</sup> Lenin emphasized increasingly that this would be a long process, involving years and years of education. In this vision the unions are seen as schools of communism, which teach the workers the art of administration.<sup>135</sup>

In 1920 Trotsky proposed to convert the trade-unions into organs of the state which should serve as instruments to conduct and win the battle at the production front, similarly as the Red Army had conducted and won the battle at the military front. On the other side the Workers' Opposition took shape, led by Shlyapnikov, and advocated to make the trade unions responsible for running the economy. They saw this as the means to combat the bureaucratism which accompanied the concentration of power at the centre and to make true that under the dictatorship of the proletariat the workers indeed were in charge themselves. Lenin opposed both propositions. He accused the Workers' Opposition of syndicalism and anarchism. Their proposal would give power to non-party masses and dismiss the leading role of the Communist Party as the vanguard of the proletariat.<sup>136</sup> Always in times of crisis Lenin falls back upon the party as the vanguard of the proletariat, as the only reliable instrument.

But Lenin also differs from Trotsky and assigns the trade-unions a place between the Party and the government.<sup>137</sup> They are on the one hand a "link between the vanguard and the masses" and on the other hand a "reservoir of the state power". In this connection Lenin uses the famous image of "transmission belts":

*"for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation. It cannot work without a number of 'transmission belts' running from the vanguard to the mass of the advanced class, and from the latter to the mass of the working people. In Russia, this mass is a peasant one".*<sup>138</sup>

The fact that the peasant population predominates in the country though the state is a workers' state and the fact "that it is a workers'



state with bureaucratic distortions” are reasons for Lenin not to give up already the traditional function of the trade-union all together. Under these conditions of transition they are also needed “to protect the workers from their state and to get them to protect our state”.<sup>139</sup> The former function gains additional importance after the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921. Once more the trade-unions will have to face the task “to protect in every way the class interests of the proletariat in its struggle against capital”. This also applies to possible conflicts between workers and management of state enterprises. Lenin is very much opposed to slogans of “industrial democracy”, and he defends the concentration of all authority in the factories in the hands of the management, but he advocates the right of strikes and trade-union actions to protect the workers against abuses.

*“Therefore, as regards the state enterprises, it is undoubtedly the duty of the trade unions to protect the class interests of the proletariat and the mass of the working people against their employers”.*<sup>140</sup>

Lenin admitted that his approach contained contradictions. He mentions the contradiction between the protection of the interests of the masses and the resort to pressure in the exercise of state power, the contradiction between persuasion and coercion. But he saw these contradictions as part of the process of transition from capitalism to socialism, and he assumed that such contradictions are “peculiar to any school”.<sup>141</sup> Meanwhile experts who had been schooled in the tsarist apparatus and in capitalist enterprises were drafted to help running the state machinery and the economy. This required strict control from above.

In a few years time the organs of economic and political self-management, the soviets and factory committees created by the revolutionary working class in Russia, lost their crucial position and power was concentrated at the top. Lenin’s analysis of the situation was realistic. His assumption that the question of workers’ management could be discussed again after twenty years<sup>142</sup> was less realistic. Defending the power gained by the revolution the Bolsheviks organised state power in a way which did not allow the emancipation of the working class as self-emancipation to evolve.

In name power remained with the soviets. Till today the terminology is that of soviet power as the name Soviet Union also indicates. But the function of soviets has completely changed and has no longer anything to do with the Commune State envisaged by Lenin in 1917. Tim Wohlforth has provided an interesting analysis of what



happened.<sup>143</sup> The strength of the original soviets was “the *directness* with which it reflected the wishes of the working class, the *ease* with which dissatisfied workers could replace their representatives, and the *class composition* of the representative body”. But already before the October revolution this power was undermined by the increasing role of parties—and party intellectuals—and by the growing concentration of power on the executive level. Actually the fusion of legislative and administrative functions which distinguished the soviets from the parliamentary set-up took place only on the level of the executive body. “Thus a cook might be able to govern—as Lenin expected in “*State and Revolution*”—if he or she happened to get elected to the narrow executive level of the Soviet. Even on this level the cook’s power would be nil unless he or she was also a leader of one of the parties”.<sup>144</sup> Already under the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries the small executive body and the administrative apparatus it started building up acquired powers which were less and less really controlled by the plenary meetings of the soviets in which the workers dominated.

After the October revolution the soviet structure had to be transformed into a functioning government apparatus. The question was whether the decentralised set-up of the existing soviets had to be changed. The constitution of 1918 opted for centralised government and tried to adapt the soviet structure. It maintained the combination of legislative and administrative functions. It also preserved the indirect electoral structure of the old soviets, which implied that only the local soviets were directly elected by the workers and peasants. These bodies elected representatives to regional bodies which in turn elected delegates to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets. This Congress elected the All-Russian Central Executive Committee which selected the Soviet of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom). Deriving its power from the highest All-Russian Soviet Congress and its Executive, Sovnarkom, i.e. the government headed by Lenin, could legislate as well as administrate. “ ‘All Power to the Soviets’ had become ‘All Power to Sovnarkom’ ”.<sup>145</sup> The workers were encouraged to exercise control and some institutions were created for the purpose, but Lenin himself complained that this control was not effective. The point is that the—unavoidable—centralisation of power turned the advantages of direct democracy in the soviets at the local level into disadvantages under the centralised set-up. Now even the indirect checks of bourgeois democracy such as the division of legislation and administration, the existence of opposition parties and direct elections on the basis of universal suffrage were absent.



*“The fusion of legislative and executive functions at a local level contributed to efficiency of direct democracy, lessened administrative alienation and expressed an actual withering away of the state. But the very same combination of powers at a level removed from the popular control, far from decreasing administrative alienation, simply allowed for an extreme concentration of authority without even the indirect checks of a bourgeois ‘division of powers’.”*<sup>146</sup>

c. Gramsci on councils, party and hegemony of the proletariat

The October Revolution in Russia inspired the working class movement elsewhere. The success of Soviet power made a tremendous impact, raising the hopes of revolutionary workers that they could make history themselves. Wherever they rose, in Hungary and Germany 1918, or in northern Italy 1919-20 they organised themselves in a similar way. Some marxist thinkers, the so-called Council Communists such as Karl Korsch and Anton Pannekoek took this up and gave central importance to *workers’ councils* as the organs of proletarian struggle and of the transformation of society.

The most important theoretical contribution in this respect has come from Antonio Gramsci who successively played a key role in the factory councils movement in Italy 1919-20 and in the formation and expansion of the Communist Party of Italy in the following years. He was a council communist in the sense that he based his theoretical outlook and political action on the praxis of the masses. But he was far from any libertarian or anarchistic inclinations, which would leave the course of action simply to the spontaneous moves of the masses. From marxist theory which he called “philosophy of praxis” and from the communist party he expected the unifying and disciplining force which would mould the proletariat through organisation and intellectual and moral reform into the new hegemonic class that could establish the new society.

The problem in Italy in 1920 was that the party of the working class was not able to lead the struggle. Recognising this Gramsci became one of those who split away from the Socialist Party (PSI) and founded the PCI. In the process he accepted for a number of years the approach followed by Bordiga who aimed at a small but “pure” party of professional revolutionaries. Gramsci himself was much more inclined to the formation of a mass based party rooted in factory councils, a line which he started implementing after becoming General Secretary. On the one hand he acknowledged the need for strict organisation and a disciplined cohesive party, but simultaneously he emphasised that its being immersed in the masses was the key to



giving successful leadership. The party should be the "result of a dialectical process in which the spontaneous movement of the revolutionary masses and the organisational and directive will of the centre converge".<sup>147</sup>

In Gramsci's understanding this focus on the relationship party-masses followed the thrust of Lenin's concept of party and he supported and implemented the Bolshevisation of the party as required by the Comintern in this spirit.<sup>148</sup> Gramsci's dialectical understanding of the relationship of party and masses enabled him to distinguish "*democratic centralism*" from "*bureaucratic centralism*" and define it as a "centralism in movement". Democratic centralism is organic, it is "a continual adaptation of the organisation to the real movement, a matching of thrusts from below with orders from above, a continuous insertion of elements thrown up from the depths of the rank and file into the solid framework of the leadership apparatus which ensures continuity and the regular accumulation of experience". It corresponds with the elements both of movement and of continuity in history. Bureaucratic centralism on the other hand closes itself off from initiatives and fresh elements from below, turning the leading group into a selfish clique.<sup>149</sup>

Meanwhile Gramsci did not abandon his conviction that the factory councils should be the cells of proletarian power, and the key form of organisation through which the party could give leadership to the proletarian masses. That is where and how class consciousness is created first of all, in the factories through the practical activity of organising the workers.

At the background of Gramsci's approach to the question of organisation in the relationship of party and masses is his concept of *hegemony*. Through the party the working class has in a certain sense to "nationalise" itself, get ready for its task of giving leadership to the revolution on the national level. The basic character of the proletariat is international, but it has to guide "social strata which are narrowly national (intellectuals), and indeed frequently even less than national particularistic and municipalistic (the peasants)".<sup>150</sup> This is an arduous task which imposes on the party the role of educator or intellectual. In the Italian context this meant that it had to tackle the "Southern Question", i.e. to bring the peasantry which was concentrated in the South under the hegemonic leadership of the working class which was concentrated in the North.

Gramsci had come to understand that fascism owed its success to a large extent to the hegemony of bourgeois intellectuals over the



Southern villages. The Southern peasants had a revolutionary potential but they had never been able to organise themselves independently. They had followed the lead of the intellectuals, of the little intellectuals on the local and regional level, the lawyers and doctors and bureaucrats, and through them of the great intellectuals on the national level. This hegemony had to be broken and replaced by proletarian leadership. This required again organisational work at the base, the formation of “associations for the defence of the peasantry”, etc.<sup>151</sup> And this called for intellectuals formed by the working class and the new social bloc led by it.<sup>152</sup> To be sure, they would be a new type of intellectuals, not satisfied with brilliant rhetoric on platforms and in parliaments, but solid organisers, and as such mediators of the philosophy of praxis.

In his Prison Notebooks Gramsci develops a systematic reflection on the role of the party under the title “The Modern Prince”. This title should fool the prison censors, but it also links once more Gramsci’s understanding of the party with the concept of hegemony. The Italian thinker Machiavelli had written his political theory—centuries ago—under the title “The Prince” arguing that Renaissance Italy with its many separate entities needed the foundation of a national state in order to survive, and he projected a programme to achieve this national unification. Gramsci reflects in a historical perspective from various angles what is needed for the “Modern Prince”, the party, to awaken and develop a “national-popular collective will”, of which it would be at the same time the organizer and the active expression, and which would be the precondition for a successful socialist revolution.

*“The modern Prince must be and cannot but be the proclaimer and organiser of an intellectual and moral reform, which also means creating the terrain for a subsequent development of the national-popular collective will towards the realisation of a superior, total form of modern civilisation”.*<sup>153</sup>

This whole approach of Gramsci to the question of party is linked with a new understanding of the revolutionary strategy required in the advanced capitalist states with the highly complex structures of the integral State. As he put it in the Notebooks: The “formula of the ‘Permanent Revolution’ is expanded and transcended in political science by the formula of ‘civil hegemony’.”<sup>154</sup> He likes to compare the change in revolutionary politics with the change in modern warfare. Reflecting on the drawn-out battles of the First World War with its complex systems of trenches, he says that the “war of



movements' increasingly has become a "war of position".

The time of rapid revolutionary victories, of uprisings that take the State in storm, and thus also the time of "permanent revolution" has gone. That was 1848 and that was 1917 in backward Russia.<sup>155</sup> It is no longer possible in the advanced States with their complex 'trench-systems' of a well-developed civil society. There it is not a matter of taking the castle of the State in one frontal assault or in a series of direct attacks, but position after position has to be conquered in civil society, and that is the task of establishing "civil hegemony". Gramsci indicates that this "war of position demands enormous sacrifices by infinite masses of people", that an "unprecedented concentration of hegemony is necessary", and that this approach is open to heavy pressure from the ruling class, as under the fascist State.<sup>156</sup>

There are fierce debates about the implications of this approach. But the main thing to be learnt from Gramsci at this point is not a ready-made prescription for revolutionary strategy, but the recognition of the complexity of the terrain which has to be conquered by the revolutionary forces; the insight that the class struggle has to be fought not only in factories and fields, not only in elections and political demonstrations, but also in the fields of literature and art, of popular culture, of education and of life-style; and finally the point that these manifold battles can be effectively fought only if they are guided and unified by a revolutionary party on the national level.

#### *d. Direct democracy and centralism*

Gramsci provided an example of dialectical integration of direct democracy at the base and centralising leaderships up to the national level. Present-day discussions quite often tend to counterpose forms of direct democracy such as soviets and forms of central organisation such as a national party as being mutually exclusive. This can be well understood as a reaction upon the triumph of bureaucratic centralism under Stalin. But it does not solve the problems concerned. Some Euro-communists and left Socialists don't seem to see another alternative to bureaucratic 'Soviet' centralism than bourgeois parliamentarism. They fall back on a social-democratic position and seem to have lost sight of the marxist critique of parliamentarism which is today not less but rather more valid than in the past. It limits and frustrates the political intervention and participation of the masses and it entrusts politics to professional politicians and bureaucrats. Whatever the need to defend parliamentary democracy against more authoritarian forms of the bourgeois State it cannot be the final word regarding the political forms of socialist democracy.



Others who are equally disgusted with bourgeois parliamentarism and Soviet bureaucratism seek a way out in return to some form of direct democracy in the tradition of Council Communism. They feel encouraged by the proliferation of grass-roots movements and envisage the construction of socialism on the basis of various networks of councils such as factory councils, neighbourhood councils, women councils, etc., in which people organise themselves.

*“The councils are the institutions of revolutionary counter-hegemony. They are the vehicle through which we the people prepare ourselves mentally and socially to administer our own lives and to overcome all obstacles to such self-management”*.<sup>157</sup>

Such visions appeal to grass-root groups all over the world. It seems a way to avoid the bureaucratism and alienation and discipline of centralised parties. That is understandable enough. But they seem to overlook some basic questions and certain lessons of history. How to prevent narrow self-interests to determine the policies of various local councils? What binds them together in an overall vision and framework? The authors just quoted trust that a “shared consciousness of the totality of capitalist oppression and socialist liberation” will take care of that. But ideological commitment alone will not be sufficient as practical experiences have shown. It needs power at the centre to keep local and regional “egoisms” in check in the decentralised set-up of Yugoslavia. And one of the reasons of the failure of “Solidarity” in Poland was its inability to control local militants who refused to subordinate their local pre-occupations—for instance with corrupt officials—to the priorities of a national strategy.

Nicos Poulantzas has argued that exclusive—and thus undialectical—reliance on direct democracy unavoidably leads back to state centralism by one way or the other. It is often assumed that Stalin’s despotic state has its roots in Lenin’s authoritarianism. There may be an element of truth in this as far as the concept of party is concerned. But with respect to the state it was Lenin’s demand to completely smash the bourgeois state and replace it by the proletarian democracy of the soviets which carried in it the seeds of Stalin’s statism according to Poulantzas. The Bolsheviks did not distinguish any progressive elements in bourgeois democracy. All of it, including representative democracy based on universal suffrage and secret ballot as well as political freedoms, were considered as part of reactionary bourgeois democracy which had to be smashed and replaced by an alternative system. Relying exclusively on the Soviet organs of direct democracy the Bolsheviks dissolved shortly after the October Revolution the



Constituent Assembly for which they themselves had campaigned all along. It was Rosa Luxemburg, the great revolutionary fighter for council democracy, and not some reformist Social-Democrat, who criticized in "The Russian Revolution" this total elimination of representative democracy. As Poulantzas quotes:

*"In place of the representative bodies created by general, popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have laid down the soviets as the only true representation of the labouring masses. But with the repression of political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element".*<sup>158</sup>

Following this lead Poulantzas rejects the choice between either maintaining the existing state, as the Social-Democrats do, or smashing it and replacing it by some system of self-management which would lead back to dictatorship of party bureaucrats or technocrats. The problem of democratic socialism has to be posed in a different way:

*"How is it possible radically to transform the State in such a manner that the extension and deepening of political freedoms and the institutions of representative democracy (which were also a conquest of the popular masses) are combined with the unfurling of forms of direct democracy and the mushrooming of self-management bodies?"*<sup>159</sup>

Instead of smashing he speaks of radically transforming the state, keeping the element of representative democracy while increasing the intervention of popular masses through forms of direct democracy. He admits that this combination has not yet successfully been tried out, but he argues that no other way to socialism is left. Underlying this approach is a concept of the capitalist state which differs from that of the traditional Communist Parties, as discussed earlier.

Raymond Williams, a British marxist writing in the theoretical journal of the Communist Party of Britain, reflects more concretely on the problems and possibilities of such combination of representative and direct democracy. His approach is based on the conviction that

*"any foreseeable socialist society must have fully adequate general powers, and that at the same time such powers must depend on deeply organised and directly participating popular forces".*<sup>160</sup>

Without the latter condition, without power in the base and from the



base, without “new kinds of communal, co-operative and collective institutions, in which the full democratic practices of free speech, free assembly, free candidature for elections but also open decision-making, of a reviewable kind” are guaranteed and practised, without such approach socialism has no chance of being established in the old industrialised bourgeois-democratic societies. The problem is how these forms of direct democracy can be linked with forms of representation at the central level. Williams comes to the important conclusion, “that we have to move beyond the all-purpose political unit and the all-purpose representative to a range of specific and varying political units and varying representatives”.<sup>161</sup> For example, industries and services under the democratic control of elected managements and boards could elect representatives for industrial councils on the national level which would control the ministries concerned.

These discussions are of practical relevance. There are not yet many answers, there is not a set model of democratic socialism. But it is necessary to analyse the pitfalls of the past in order to avoid them in the future. And a new realistic perspective of socialist democracy is needed in order to attract the growing potentially anti-capitalist mass movements into the struggle for socialism.

## **5. Revolutionary Violence**

### *a. Marx and Engels*

Often the question of revolution is reduced to the question: for or against violence. Many people imagine marxism to be essentially a doctrine of violence. There are indeed certain groups like the followers of the late Charu Mazumder who consider their “annihilation” tactics almost as the main criterion of true revolutionary marxism. For them the use of violence seems to have become the core of their political and ideological convictions. Though they may be highly committed revolutionaries who are ready to face great sacrifices, spending many years in jail or losing their life in “encounters” with the police, they cannot claim marxist tradition for their line. Actually their approach fits much more into the tradition of anarchistic terrorism, which usually attracts peasants on the one hand and students and other petty-bourgeois elements on the other hand.<sup>162</sup> It is quite remote from Marx’s own understanding of the role of violence in the revolutionary process.

Of course, Marx was not a pacifist. His whole approach to the question of violence differs from those who take it primarily as a moral problem. He first of all asks, why is there violence, not whether it is



right or wrong. Marxism is not a moral philosophy but an analytical theory, though it implies also value-judgements. Marx' critical analysis of violent class society presupposes the conviction that a truly human society would solve its problems without violence. But he does not preach this as a guideline for action in violent class-society. His starting point is the historical and social reality of violence. In his analysis he shows that violence is part of any exploitative society. He did not raise the banner of violent revolution in order to overthrow peaceful non-violent societies, but he expected the proletarian revolution, violent as it might be, to end the history of exploitation and violence.

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". Oppressors and oppressed, in different types of society, "carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight".<sup>163</sup> History has been a history of struggle, and thus of force and physical violence, because it has been a history of class societies and exploitation. This also applies to bourgeois society which tries to hide its violent character behind the rule of law. Meanwhile the bourgeoisie has played its progressive role, it has created the modern productive forces and the world market, and above all the proletariat as its grave-digger. Now its time to abdicate has come, as it is unable to overcome the mass misery it creates. The time has come where "the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society... breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundations for the sway of the proletariat".<sup>164</sup>

Marx had no doubts that the exploited had the right—actually they had the historical task—, to overthrow an exploitative and repressive system which had outlived its utility. Living in the first generation after the Great French Revolution he took it for granted, at least in his early days, that physical violence would be an unavoidable part of the force used in a process for revolutionary transformation. The bourgeois revolution in England and France had all been rather violent and it was to be expected that the bourgeoisie as ruling class would not voluntarily quit and that the proletarian revolution consequently also would have to take a violent form.

However, the violence used by the proletariat would be different in Marx's eyes. He was convinced that the proletarian revolution would be the last violent revolution. As it would lead to abolishing of classes and of exploitative antagonisms it would finally bring about a non-violent society. This revolution would mark the transition from pre-history with all its brutality and violence to human history in which evolution would take a peaceful form, as it fits true human beings.



Both aspects, the unavailability of violence and its end are forcefully expressed at the end of "The Poverty of Philosophy", written in 1847 against Proudhon:

*"Indeed, is it not at all surprising that a society founded on the **opposition** of classes should culminate in brutal **contradiction**, the shock of body against body... It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that **social evolutions** will cease to be **political revolutions**. Till then, on the eve of every general reshuffling of society, the last word of social science will always be: 'Combat or death, bloody struggle or extinction'."*<sup>165</sup>

Here it is assumed that the final confrontation will be a bloody one. But the measures proposed in the Communist Manifesto indicate that Marx thinks of physical violence mainly with regard to the conquest of power. After that he envisages rather the use of legalised force—which of course presupposes the threat of physical violence by the state—to sweep away the old conditions of production through expropriation, taxation, etc. These "despotic inroads on the rights of property"<sup>166</sup> imply force as any implementation of legislation does and as such they are part of the class struggle. This approach which aims at the change of structures is a logical outcome of historical materialism. Killing individual class enemies does not change or abolish the class structure. On the other hand, undermining the class structure through revolutionary legislation deprives the class enemy of his source of power. A landlord without land, a press-tsar without press cease to be dangerous class enemies.

It is a problem of youthful radicals that they are inclined to have a rather romantic idea of revolutionary activity, with a lot of spectacular action, with barricades and bombs, burning buses and blowing up bridges. Under the specific circumstances of an armed liberation struggle, military action is part of the revolutionary struggle. Even then politics should be in command. In any case the criterion of revolutionary success is not the number of landlords killed but the advance made in changing the correlation of social forces, the advance made in the conquest of social, economic and political power. Annihilation tactics and other adventurous actions that alienate the masses achieve the opposite, namely the strengthening of the repressive powers of the state which are also used to block other roads of possible advance. This is the case in a situation where the conditions for armed liberation struggle are absent and where the key to advance lies in the organisation and mobilisation on a mass scale.



Nobody will doubt Karl Marx's revolutionary credentials. But his understanding of revolutionary action included very prosaic forms of struggle. For example, he considered the legal shortening of the working day a revolutionary success though it was achieved without the conquest of political power in the sense of a revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois regime. Thus he criticised the Proudhonists:

*"They reject all **revolutionary** action, that is, action arising out of the class struggle itself, all concentrated, social movements and therefore also those which can be carried through by **political means** (for instance the **legal** shortening of the working day)".*<sup>167</sup>

Such a legal measure is revolutionary in Marx's eyes, because it promotes the interests of the working class with the coercive force of law. On the basis of its organised strength, its agitations and strikes, the working class is able to exercise its force finally also through the law. The "movement to force through an eight-hour, etc., law is a *political* movement..., that is to say, a class movement, with the object of enforcing its interests in a general form, in a form possessing general, socially coercive force".<sup>168</sup>

This does not mean that Marx suggests that capitalism can be transformed through legal reforms alone. He highlights their potential for advance towards the goal, but he knows that no way leads past a decisive confrontation with the ruling class and the overthrow of the bourgeois regime by the proletariat by whatever means.

In his later work, in "Grundrisse" and "Capital", Marx went into a deep analysis of the coercion and violence hidden in the structure of capitalist society which claims to be so democratic, lawful and peaceful. At its birth, in the period of primitive accumulation, the role of force can be clearly seen. Some methods of primitive accumulation depended on "brute force", e.g. "the colonial system". Other methods look a bit more civilised, such as "national debt, the modern mode of taxation, and the protectionist system".

*"But they all employ the power of the State, the concentrated and organised force of society, to hasten, hot-house fashion, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition. Force is the mid-wife of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power".*<sup>169</sup>



In the preceding chapters Marx had documented the brutal force and naked violence used for the expropriation of the agricultural population<sup>170</sup> and the “bloody legislation against the expropriated”.<sup>171</sup> A “great slaughter of the innocents”—child labour—and slave trade are shown to have accompanied the “genesis of the industrial capitalist”.<sup>172</sup>

*“If money, according to Augier, ‘comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek’, capital comes dripping from head to feet, from every pore, with blood and dirt”.*<sup>173</sup>

But once capital had established itself it needed no longer such primitive bloody means for further accumulation. At its surface bourgeois society could start projecting a peaceful image of free trade, lawful contracts, equality before the law, democratic rights, etc., and accusing anybody who demands its revolutionary transformation of propagating violence against a law abiding and peace loving society.

It is a great merit of Marx’ analysis of “Capital” to have revealed the *hidden violent structure* underneath the seemingly peaceful surface of bourgeois society. The conspicuous force and violence of pre-capitalist and early capitalist society may more or less have gone. Privileges no longer legitimate forceful extraction of labour or money, bonded labourers and serfs are no longer there. “Free labourers” can choose their jobs and as political subjects they are supposed to have equal rights under the law at least in a democratic republic. The use of force has become a monopoly of the state, and elections are said to give citizens a share in the control over the state. That is how bourgeois society presents itself. Of course, even on the surface one can see the cracks in this peaceful image. The massacres of workers in Paris in 1848 and 1871 in the time of Marx, many capitalist countries taking to authoritarian forms of state and brutal forms of repression today, give plenty of evidence for the violent character of bourgeois society on the political level.

But Marx has gone deeper by showing where even in more peaceful times the use of force has hidden itself permanently and structurally in capitalist society. One has to leave the sphere of free contracts, the “very Eden of the innate rights of man”, and one has to follow the free labourer who has just by his own free will sold his labour power to the capitalist—of course, forced by the economic fact that he and his family have no other way to survive—, one has to follow him “into the hidden abode of production, on whose treshold there stares us in the face ‘No admittance except on business.’ ”<sup>174</sup> There the *extraction of surplus-value* takes place, the secret of capitalist exploitation and



accumulation, and thus the core of violence in bourgeois society. The capitalist exploiters may not shoot anybody—though often enough they do also that—, but this structure of exploitation kills quietly by other means. It operates through economic compulsion. The workers have no other choice than to sell their labour-power. And once they are under the despotic command of capital they have to obey. They are exploited. They have to adapt and submit to de-humanising forms of work. Where wages are low they have to live under harmful conditions. Where living standards have been raised capitalism turns out to be killing in another way. More and more people are psychologically affected by its strains and stresses. Everywhere pollution damaging to health and unemployment are hitting. And when people start protesting against these exploitative and oppressive structures repression follows, if necessary with brutal violence, revealing the violent nature of the capitalist system. From this analysis follows that for Marx the main aim of the socialist revolution had to be the abolition of wage labour as the fundament of capitalist exploitation and violence in bourgeois society.

The older Marx of the sixties and seventies was less fixed on the model of the French Revolution regarding the question what forms a socialist revolution might take. He still expected as usual pattern a violent confrontation wherever authoritarian regimes were in power—and that was the case almost everywhere on the European continent—, but he did no longer exclude the possibility of peaceful conquest of political power by the proletariat in more democratic countries such as Britain and USA where the proletariat could build up its organisations on a mass base.<sup>175</sup> The older Engels would nurture quite high hopes about the perspectives to capture power through the ballot, seeing the impressive growth especially of the workers organisations in Germany. But both, Marx and Engels, were realistic enough to reckon with the probability that a bourgeoisie defeated by the ballot would fight back with other means and thus force eventually a civil war upon the proletariat.

Given the violent character of capitalist society Marx and Engels had no doubts regarding the *right of the exploited masses to use revolutionary violence*, if needed, in order to overcome capitalism. But as they saw the fundament of capitalism and its violence in the exploitative structure they had no longer confidence in what *revolutionary terror* could achieve, as they may have had in their younger days. Revolution had been associated with terror, especially since the reign of Terror under the Jacobins (Robespierre) with their guillotines in the French Revolution in 1793. It is often said that Marx



had great sympathy for the Jacobins implying that he admired the revolutionary use of the guillotine. Lenin quotes with great appreciation a remark of Marx in 1848 saying that “the whole French terrorism was nothing but a plebeian manner of settling accounts with the enemies of the bourgeoisie, with absolutism, feudalism, and philistinism”.<sup>176</sup> As a revolutionary Marx certainly sympathised with the radicalism of the Jacobins, but he came to see their terrorism rather as a proof of their failure. What many people fail to understand is that Marx does not condemn their terrorism on purely moral grounds but on historical grounds. They were not morally wrong because they used violence, but they were historically wrong because their political revolution had no proper social basis.

It is impossible according to Marx to bring about socio-economic transformation through terroristic means. The conditions must be ripe for it. Then change is possible and terror is not needed. If terror is needed, conditions are obviously not ripe. In other words, terror is an indication of failure. Marx is not morally opposed to violence—he lived before the use of violence both in war and in repression by the state reached the apocalyptic dimensions of the 20th century—but he wants it to play a subordinate role. For him revolutionary violence, if at all needed, is like the knife with which the midwife cuts the umbilical cord. It is an instrument which helps the new which has grown in the womb of the old to come into being. But if nothing has grown violence cannot create it. Violence is not creative, as Bakunin thought who assumed that the destruction of the old itself would create the new. For Marx revolutionary violence is only a subordinate means which may be needed during the painful process of the birth of a new society.

Marx's whole historical materialist approach implies that the proletariat should exercise revolutionary patience. It should not rise prematurely before the conditions for real transformation are ripe. Otherwise terror will be needed, and terror is self-defeating, as it isolates the revolutionary class. That is the basic difference with the Blanquists and anarchists in the First International.

Friedrich Engels, in a letter to Marx points at the real secret of terror. It is not a sign of radicalism but of fear. Writing on the “Reign of Terror” in the French Revolution he says:

*“We take this to mean the rule of people who inspire terror. On the contrary, it is the rule of people who themselves are terror-stricken. Terror implies mostly useless cruelties perpetuated by frightened people in order to reassure themselves. I am convinced that the blame for the Reign of Terror in 1793 lies almost exclusively with*



*the bourgeois frightened out of their wits and demeaning themselves like patriots, with the small philistines quaking with fear and the mob of the underworld who know how to coin profit from terror. These are just the classes in the present minor terror too".*<sup>177</sup>

The revolutionary terrorists in 19th century Russia were a different case. They attacked the highest representatives of the Tsarist regime. Marx and Engels sympathised with them in the hope that they would be able to crack the Tsarist bulwark on the political level and thus contribute to the acceleration of the social revolution both in Western Europe and Russia. Lenin's elder brother was involved in one of the last attempts on the life of a Tsar. He was hanged for it in 1887. Lenin concluded that in Russia also only class struggle and not the heroic deeds of terrorists could overthrow Tsarism.

#### *b. Lenin and after*

Lenin returns in many respects to the Marx of 1848 and of the Europe of crisis and revolutionary upheaval. The revolutionary movement in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century was still facing an autocratic government which needed to be replaced by a bourgeois democratic set-up. The social-democratic mass parties in Western Europe were about to give up the concept of violent overthrow as a practical option. They were facing socially rather stable regimes which were on top of it equipped with highly sophisticated military technology—as Engels had pointed out. They started counting either on a gradual peaceful development towards socialism—as Bernstein and his followers did—or on the weapon of mass mobilisation and general strike at the decisive moment—as Kautsky and others were proposing. Only the syndicalists in France and revolutionaries like Rosa Luxemburg were still anticipating and propagating a violent revolutionary confrontation in Western Europe.

The Russian situation resembled much more that of the pre-revolutionary situation in 1847 in Germany or Austria. The highly repressive regime of the Tsar did not allow any legal form of action and thus invited illegal violent action. Lenin proclaimed the necessity of violent revolution against Tsarism and rejected any peaceful alternative as a dangerous illusion. His concept of party organisation which he developed in "What is to be done?" was geared to that task: the party had to be built on the line of a military organisation, with central command and strict discipline, in order to be able to take up and lead the fight against the armed enemy, the centralised state of Tsarist Russia.

The Bloody Sunday came, in January 1905, when the Tsarist state



declared war on peaceful demonstrating workers organised by a yellow union. A wave of strikes, peasant rebellions and mutinies followed. On hearing the news of the massacre on Bloody Sunday, Lenin went straight to the library and ordered books on the military aspects of street fighting, etc. He immediately advocated, as no marxist had done before him, to prepare concretely for an organised *armed uprising* as the necessary culmination of the revolutionary bid for overthrowing the tsarist regime. Lenin bases his approach not only on an analysis of the autocratic regime in Russia, but on a more general understanding of history, similar to that of Marx and Engels in 1848:

*“In the final analysis force alone settles the great problems of political liberty and the class struggle, and it is our business to prepare and organise this force and to employ it actively, not only for defense but also for attack”.*<sup>178</sup>

If successful, such an uprising will lead to the establishment of a dictatorship which will be needed to beat off the resistance of landlords, bourgeoisie and tsarists against changes in favour of workers and peasants. Such a dictatorship

*“must inevitably rely on military force, on the arming of the masses, on an insurrection, and not on institutions of one kind or another established in a ‘lawful’ or ‘peaceful’ way”.*<sup>179</sup>

It is in this connection that Lenin also quotes Marx about the plebeian manner in which the Jacobins with their terror settled accounts with their enemies.<sup>180</sup>

So far Lenin's heavy emphasis on the use of force can be understood in the context of the specific conditions prevailing in Russia. The military character of his new type of party organisation and his concrete planning for an armed uprising differ from the marxist tradition as it developed in Western Europe. At the same time he clearly distinguishes himself from the anarchistic use of terror as it was popular among the Social Revolutionaries on the one hand and from any Blanquist schemes of conquering power through a secretly planned coup on the other hand. As marxist he wants the armed uprising to be based on the action of the class and of the people at large.

However, Lenin's approach acquires a new dimension with world-wide consequences in the framework of his *theory of imperialism* which he develops during the First World War. His approach in the years after 1902 had only led to the split of the Russian Social Democrats, dividing them in Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. But his theory of imperialism becomes the starting point for the split of the



international working class movement, dividing them in Social-Democrats and Communists.

Imperialism, according to Lenin's analysis is capitalism in its highest and last stage. It is capitalism which has outlived all progressive features of bourgeois democracy and economic development. It is a capitalism which has become utterly reactionary, everywhere and all-round.

*"Imperialism is the epoch of finance capital and monopolies, which introduce everywhere the striving for domination, not for freedom. Whatever the political system, the result of these tendencies is everywhere reaction and an extreme intensification of antagonisms in this field".*<sup>181</sup>

This imperialism can maintain its domination "only by continually increasing its military forces". This certainly cannot be denied, but the next conclusion of Lenin is highly problematic. Assuming that imperialism has the tendency to create a "rentier state", an "usurer state, in which the bourgeoisie to an ever-increasing degree lives on the proceeds of capital exports", he defines it "as parasitic or decaying capitalism".<sup>182</sup> That does not exclude economic growth, but that will be very uneven. The high profits will mainly serve to bribe sections of the working class and thus to create a bond between imperialism and opportunism. Kautsky thought that imperialistic capitalism could become peaceful and democratic again. But Lenin is sure that this "moribund capitalism" was utterly destructive and reactionary and rotten enough to be finished off by a mighty revolutionary death-blow. He expected the imperialist world war to lead to the socialist world revolution. He propagated to turn the imperialist war into civil war. Let the workers turn their guns on their own exploiters.

Actual events rather differed from Lenin's expectation. The German and Austrian empires indeed broke down at the end of the war and there were revolutionary upheavals in Germany and Hungary, but they did not usher a successful socialist transformation. The only successful revolution took place in Russia itself. Surprisingly, it needed almost no violent pressure to bring Tsarism tumbling down. It was indeed a decaying, moribund regime that collapsed within a few days in February 1917 under the pressure of a wave of popular protest. Power was for the taking. It fell into the hands of the Provisional Government on the one side and of the Soviets on the other side. Soon Lenin was demanding the transfer of all power to the soviets. Again he stressed the need for a carefully prepared plan for armed uprising at the decisive moment. And again it turned out that



the physical violence needed in the October Revolution was rather minimal. Very few people were killed during "the Ten Days that Shook the World". Tramways continued to ply in Petersburg while the Bolsheviks took power. The transfer of power to the soviets was almost a legal affair. The wide-scale use of violence started only half a year later in 1918 when the civil war began.

"White Terror" was countered with "Red Terror". Lenin and Trotsky—like all marxists before them—had rejected individual terror, but under the conditions of the Civil War, in the bitter fight for survival against enemies closing in from all sides on the revolutionary regime, they wholeheartedly defended the use of organised "Red Terror" against the criticism of Kautsky and others. This criticism and the horror-stories from the Civil War which reached the outside world not only through white counter-revolutionaries but also through leftist opponents of the Bolsheviks created a lasting negative image of bloody Bolsheviks. That image served not only to horrify the bourgeoisie but also to alienate sections of the working class movement elsewhere from the Soviet revolution. Some Bolshevik propagandists contributed to this effect by glorifying the ruthless use of "Red Terror" as something heroic and most revolutionary. Lenin and Trotsky defended it only as a necessity. They exposed the hypocrisy of those who kept quiet about the terror of the world war caused by imperialism. And they justified the use of violence as the only means to break the repressive violence of imperialism and to bring about socialism. Thus "Red Terror" was seen as progressive, liberating violence.

Of course, the desperate situation of a civil war is not the time and place where careful distinctions regarding the use of violence are likely to be made. But from a historical distance one can easily see that the use of terror in this case also was rather a sign of weakness. It was needed not only to counter the enemies of the revolution, but also to enforce government decisions, to requisition food for the cities from reluctant peasants, etc. The Bolsheviks did not have time to consider the long term effects of the antagonising impact of the terror used. They went ahead in a rather pragmatic manner. But the fact that the victorious revolution and the struggle for socialism in the specific context of a Civil War which was imposed on the Soviet regime got associated with the use of direct violence without any lawful control had far-reaching consequences.

Stalin picked up the arguments used in the Civil War to justify the large-scale violence used by the bureaucratic repressive apparatus of



the State in the thirties. He revived the Civil War terminology and enemy-friend schemes to enforce a rapid transformation of socio-economic structures from above. And there were no means of socialist legality to stop it. This terror of the thirties was different from that of 1918-1920, not only in scale but also in character. It was a combination of large-scale physical killing with the exercise of force by a huge bureaucratic state apparatus which had an absolute and uncontrolled monopoly of power.

The post-revolutionary terror exercised on a mass-scale by Stalin in the past and by Pol Pot in our days is not only an indication of the immaturity of the revolutions they were presiding over. It also shows that in the heat of the struggle revolutionaries run the danger of getting used to violence as the main means to solve problems. Defending the great October Revolution against the hypocritical attacks of its enemies communists have unnecessarily tended to condone or justify in an apologetic manner all what has happened as necessary for the victory of the revolution. Much of it might have been necessary, but there is no reason to deny the problems involved. Those who dismiss all questions about "terror" as petty-bourgeois sentimentality forget that violence and terror for marxist revolutionaries are necessarily problematic, because it is part and product of the old society against which they fight and which they want to overcome.

Only for fascists violence is something glorious, an end in itself, a proof of virility and heroism. With a long history of strikes the working class movements have shown that it is possible to fight and win militant and heroic battles without using violence. However, this history also shows that the working class movement is forced to use revolutionary violence. In that case it will be proud of revolutionary fighters who risk their life in the struggle. But it can never indulge in the glorification of destruction and killing. It would forget and betray its basic goal of a society which serves life. Violence is one of the negative characteristics of the old society which it wants to overcome and which therefore it cannot glorify. Revolutionary violence may be necessary under certain circumstances, but it requires truly revolutionary consciousness to keep it under control and not to get caught in its whirls. It requires an awareness of its destructive potential not only in killing the enemy but also in affecting the killer.

Few marxists have reflected on the *anthropological aspect* of violence which is studied by human sciences. The question is whether violent *aggression* is an essential part of human behaviour or a product of social circumstances.<sup>183</sup> If the first is true, external authority with a



monopoly of power is needed to repress this human inclination. In that case a non-violent society and full freedom are an utopian dream which human nature never will allow to come true. That is the reasoning of political conservatives. Revolutionaries, on the other hand, assume that human beings are essentially peace-loving, socially minded and creative. But they have difficulty to explain the excessive level of violence marking human history so far. With their emphasis on structural causes, marxists have tended to underestimate the role of ruthless craving for power, aggressivity and sadism in the psychological make-up of some of those who exercise power. Is all violence in history an unavoidable outcome of the social conditioning of human beings? Or is there something in their nature which drives them to violence under certain conditions?

The Yugoslavian marxist Mihailo Markovic has taken up this question.<sup>184</sup> He concludes from the observation of history that there are conflicting tendencies in human nature:

*“Previous history provides ample evidence about these conflicting tendencies: craving for freedom but also escape from responsibility; a striving for inter-group and international collaboration and solidarity but also class, national, and racial egoism; a need for creativity, but also powerful destructive drives; a readiness for self-sacrifice in certain conditions, but also a strong lust for personal power and domination in some others; a profound need for love, but also an incomprehensible, irrational need to inflict pain and suffering on both the hated and beloved ones.”*<sup>185</sup>

As both tendencies are there, the point is to do away with conditions which are conducive to the aggressive tendency to become harmful and destructive, and to create conditions in which it finds harmless outlets while the tendency towards solidarity is promoted.

With regard to the use of revolutionary violence Markovic points at a remarkable paradox: Many present-day liberals believe that violence is an inherent tendency in human nature. But they reject violence as an instrument of social change. On the other hand many revolutionaries believe that man is essentially non-violent. But they affirm violence as a necessary or even sole means of social change.<sup>186</sup> The experience of the twentieth century, including the experience that the use of violence did not recede as expected after the revolution, challenges contemporary Marxism to deeply analyse these historical experiences and to ask concretely from situation to situation how the use of violence can be minimised. Or as Markovic points it:



*“how to create a movement that would be strong enough to seize political power and to enforce necessary structural changes, without becoming bureaucratic and returning to the old forms of direct and structural violence.”*<sup>187</sup>

### c. Revolution, war and peace

In our time the question of violence has acquired a completely new dimension as gigantic military-industrial complexes are stock-piling and distributing the means for the total destruction of the globe and human-kind. The global confrontation of the nuclear powers and the perception of global politics by US imperialism affect the perspectives and possibilities of revolutionary struggles on a national level.

For Marx and Engels, living in the 19th century, wars were still the continuation of politics with other means. They were part of political life and Marx and Engels evaluated them from their revolutionary perspective. Sometimes they welcomed a war or the possibility of a war as a helpful catalyst for the revolution. But this depended on the concrete situation. For example, in the case of the German-French war in 1870 Marx advised the workers to support Germany in the first phase till the downfall of the Bonaparte regime in France, but to oppose the war as soon as it would turn into a war of conquest, as this would have disastrous consequences in the future. Basically they saw the promise and guarantee of peace in the growing international solidarity of the working class. The exchange of good-will messages between French and German workers during the war indicated to them that “the alliance of the working classes of all countries will ultimately kill war.”

*“It proves that in contrast to old society, with its economical miseries and its political delirium, a new society is springing up, whose International rule will be **Peace**, because its national ruler will be everywhere the same — Labour!”*<sup>188</sup>

The Second International (1889-1914) was building on that international solidarity, assuming that it could prevent the next war to break out. It collapsed in 1914 when the national working class parties opted for supporting the war efforts of their respective countries or rather bourgeoisies in the First World War.

Engels who was considered to be a military expert in his own rights had been equally optimistic that the time of war was over on other grounds. Analysing the innovations in military technology and warfare in the German-French war he thought that no further escalation was possible.



*"In the first place the weapons used have reached such a stage of perfection that further progress which would have any revolutionising influence is no longer possible."*

He could not imagine that further industrial and technological developments would take the tools of war out of the hands of soldiers, as capitalist industry had taken the tools away from the workers and incorporated them into machines, and that humankind would end up with automatised war-machines.

*"The army has become the main purpose of the state, and an end in itself; the peoples are there only to provide soldiers and feed them. Militarism dominates and is swallowing Europe. But this militarism also bears within itself the seed of its own destruction."*

Engels saw in the development towards universal compulsory military service the chance that people could make their will felt. As the workers and peasants develop a will of their own they will refuse to work "and militarism collapses by the dialectics of its own evolution."<sup>189</sup>

Unfortunately Engels' predictions did not come true. Militarism has grown to unprecedented proportions and is today swallowing the world. Even socialist countries do not escape from an increasing influence of the army and of military considerations caught up as they are in the arms-race and confrontation with the capitalist countries.

All this has important consequences for the perspectives of revolution. Earlier wars indeed had triggered off revolutionary developments, as in the case of Russia in 1905 and 1917, or had contributed to the victory of revolutionary forces as in Yugoslavia and China. But the Cold War and arms race between the two blocs led by the USA and the USSR have had a paralysing effect on the processes of radical change in the developed countries. In Asia, Africa and Latin America several revolutionary movements have been successful during this period. But in the leading capitalist countries all movements for radical transformation got blocked by the Cold War. Similarly all popular attempts to correct the regimes in Eastern Europe were suppressed on the same account.

The very division between West and East, between US-controlled and USSR-controlled zones of influence was not based on the correlation of social and political forces in the respective countries, but on geographical and geo-political factors, on borderlines drawn according to strategic and military considerations by Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill at the end of the Second World War. The communists in



Italy and France had a mass-basis and were armed. They had to submit to bourgeois governments and were not allowed by Stalin to make a bid for power. The armed uprising in Greece led by the communists was crushed with the help of British intervention. On the other hand, the communist parties in Poland, Hungary and Rumania were extremely weak—partly due to the purges of Stalin—and yet they were established in power—by the grace of the Red Army—and started to transform their societies from above. Movements of protest against Stalinist regimes were repressed with the help of Russian tanks in Berlin in 1953 and Hungary in 1956. And popular movements for socialist renewal, led by the communist party (CSSR) or recognised by the party (Poland), were blocked by armed intervention (Prague 1968) and martial law (Poland 1981). In all these cases socio-political processes were crushed by military means and the main justification was that the Soviet bloc could not afford to loose control over one of the links in its chain of defence against the NATO bloc. Similarly the CP of France refused to turn the massive popular upsurge in Paris 1968 into a revolutionary bid for power, as it anticipated military intervention. The USA, and especially the NATO, would not allow a leftist take-over under communist leadership in its zone of influence.

The danger of the situation is not only that the East-West confrontation blocks internal progress on both sides, but that the militarism which accompanies the arms-race transforms societies in the opposite direction. The over-riding power of the military—industrial complex in capitalist countries and the process of militarisation of society are becoming more and more visible. On the other side of the divide production for military purposes is much more under political control and its conversion into production for peaceful purposes is only a matter of planning and political decision-making. But the impact of a growing military establishment, the secrecy that goes with it, and the priorities it sets in politics, research, education, etc., can only have a negative impact on the perspective of building socialism. In the long run no socialism is possible in the shadow of a gigantic military apparatus. When Reagan and the like say that they want to bring the USSR down through the arms-race they may primarily think of economic pressures. But the political, social and ideological ramifications of the military build-up may be the greater danger. Whatever his shortcomings otherwise Krushchev rightly recognised that the future, any future, also the future of socialism depends on the ability to avoid the nuclear holocaust. And one may add, it depends also on a victory over militarism through disarmament.



What does this mean for revolutionary movements in the Third World which have taken up arms in their struggle for liberation? Understandably they are inclined to approach movements for peace and disarmament with great suspicion. Such movements may contribute to the stabilisation of the status quo. What peaceful coexistence can there be with imperialism? On the other hand, activists in the peace movements may feel that those revolutionaries underestimate the risks of a global nuclear war triggered off by local wars. What is needed, however, is that both discover each other as allies fighting the same enemy: imperial capitalism. The peace-movements try to curb its military expansion and this would ease also the struggle of the liberation movements. The latter weaken the global control of the imperialist powers. The victory of the armed people of Nicaragua over the US-puppet regime of Somoza was a victory over the same US-imperialism which the peace-movements fight in their non-violent struggles against arms-race and for disarmament. The world has reached a point where all contradictions and struggles are closely interlinked. This makes a dialectical analysis in a global framework all the more necessary.<sup>190</sup>

## NOTES

1. Sel. Works 3, 163.
2. Sept. 1850, Coll. Works 10, 626.
3. Sel. Works 1, 502 f.
4. Sel. Works 1, 113.
5. See Avineri, op. cit., 153 ff. and the letter of Marx to Engels, July 27, 1854, about the revolutionary character of the municipal movement, Sel. Corr., 81-83.
6. Preface, Sel. Works 1, 504.
7. Problems of Political Economy of Socialism, Calcutta, 1962, 13 f.
8. Engels, "Karl Marx", Sel. Works 3, 84 f.; this is quoted by Ajit Roy in his argument against the "Bernsteinism" of Eurocommunism in: 'Eurocommunism'. An Analytical Study, Calcutta, 1978, 62 f.
9. Engels, *ibid.*, 85 f.
10. *ibid.*
11. Sel. Works 1, 119.
12. Capital I, Ch. XXXII.
13. Capital I, 714 f.
14. *ibid.*, 715.
15. *ibid.*
16. Sel. Works 2, 16.
17. *ibid.*



18. *ibid.*
19. *ibid.*, 17.
20. See Capital III, Ch. XXVII, The Role of Credit in Capitalist Production, 435 ff; cf. Avineri, 177 ff.
21. Capital III, 440; Wang Xizhe in an interesting article "For a Return to Genuine Marxism in China", uses this passage to present the socialist countries as "merely enlarged forms of workers' co-operative factories"; see The Marxist Review, Feb. 1982.
22. See Capital III, 436 f; Marx comments here also on the new phenomenon of managers who are no longer owners and owners who are not managing.
23. Capital III, 440 f.
24. Letter to Engels, April 2, 1858, Sel. Corr., 97.
25. Marx, Critical Marginal Notes on the Article by a Prussian, 1844, Coll. Works 3, 204.
26. *ibid.*, 205.
27. *ibid.*, 204.
28. The Poverty of Philosophy, Coll. Works 6, 211.
29. *ibid.*, 212.
30. Sel. Works 2, 19.
31. Sel. Corr., 155.
32. Sel. Works 3, 25.
33. Engels to Bernstein, 27.8.1883, Sel. Corr., 343.
34. Capital I, 20.
35. Sel. Works 2, 174 f.
36. *ibid.*, 174 f.
37. *ibid.*, 176.
38. Sel. Works 1, 120
39. *ibid.*, 136 f.
40. *ibid.*, 137.
41. See B. Nicolaevskij, Karl Marx. Man and Fighter, 198 f.
42. Sel. Works 1, 179.
43. *ibid.*, 179, cf. 185.
44. *ibid.*, 183.
45. Sel. Corr., 86.
46. From Comments on Bakunin's book "Statehood and Anarchy", Sel. Works 2, 411.
47. *ibid.*
48. Marx-Engels, Preface to the 1882 Russian ed. of the Manifesto of the Communist Party, Sel. Works 1, 100 f.
49. See M. Liebman, Leninism under Lenin, London, Merlin, 1980.
50. Our Revolution, Jan. 1923, Lenin, Coll. Works 33, 476.
51. *ibid.*, 478.
52. *ibid.*, 480.



53. *Sel. Works of Mao Tse-tung* I, 23 f.
54. *On New Democracy*, Jan. 1940, *Sel. Works* II, 350.
55. *ibid.*, 348 f.
56. *ibid.*, 347.
57. Draper, *op. cit.*, 59.
58. *Coll. Works* 3, 142-144.
59. *Anti-Duehring*, 124.
60. *ibid.*, 122 f.
61. *ibid.*, 125.
62. Cf. Draper, *op. cit.*, 284.
63. *ibid.*, 287 ff.
64. Nicolaevskij, Karl Marx, 172.
65. *Coll. Works* 1, 180.
66. *ibid.*, 166.
67. *ibid.*, 153.
68. quoted by Draper, 292.
69. quoted *ibid.*
70. *Coll. Works* 13, 219; cf. Draper, 305 ff.
71. Draper, 310.
72. *Coll. Works* 3, 393.
73. *Coll. Works* 1, 513.
74. *Sel. Works* 1, 212.
75. *ibid.*, 223.
76. *ibid.*, 225.
77. *ibid.*, 235 f.
78. *ibid.*, 285.
79. *ibid.*, 286.
80. *ibid.*, 283.
81. *ibid.*, 435.
82. 24.3.1884, *Sel. Corr.*, 350.
83. See letter of Engels to Bebel, 11.12.1884, *Sel. Corr.*, 359 f.
84. *Sel. Works* 1, 120.
85. *ibid.*, 126.
86. *ibid.*, 126 f.
87. *ibid.*, 127.
88. *ibid.*, 120.
89. *ibid.*, 121.
90. *ibid.*, 127.
91. *ibid.*, 528.



92. *Sel. Works* 3, 25.
93. *ibid.*, 26 f.
94. *ibid.*, 25.
95. For a short survey of the events, see F. Engels, *Introduction to the Civil War in France*, *Sel. Works* 2, 178 ff.; for further historical information, see Nicolaievsky, Karl Marx.
96. *Sel. Corr.*, 318.
97. *Sel. Works* 2, 223.
98. *ibid.*, 219.
99. *ibid.*, 217 f.
100. *ibid.*, 220.
101. Cf. the quotation above from *Sel. Works* 3, 25.
102. *Sel. Works* 2, 188.
103. *ibid.*, 189.
104. *ibid.*, 223.
105. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, 77.
106. *State and Revolution*, written in Sept. 1917, Lenin, *Coll. Works* 25, 402.
107. *ibid.*
108. *ibid.*, 463.
109. *ibid.*, 421.
110. *ibid.*, 425.
111. Quoted by R. Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, NLB, 1978, 106.
112. See Bahro and the review of his analysis by G. Dietrich in: *The Marxist Review*, Aug. and Sept. 1981.
113. Quoted by Bahro, 99 f.
114. See the ten measures mentioned in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.
115. Cf. the remark of the early Marx: "deification of authority" is the credo of the bureaucracy, *Coll. Works* 3, 47.
116. See Ajit Roy, *Euro-communism. An analytical study*.
117. *Sel. Works* 1, 115 f.
118. *Poverty of Philosophy*, *Coll. Works* 6, 211.
119. Milliband, *Marxism and Politics*, 33.
120. *Sel. Works* 1, 120.
121. *Sel. Works* 2, 253 f.
122. *ibid.*, 271.
123. *ibid.*, 253.
124. *ibid.*, 19.
125. Milliband, *Marxism and Politics*, 131.
126. From a speech to a delegation of German trade-unionists, 1869, quoted by McLellan, *Thought*, *op. cit.*, 175 f.
127. *Sel. Works* 2, 291.



128. Eighteenth Brumaire, Sel. Works 1, 401.
129. Sel. Works 3, 189 f.
130. See Sel. Works 2, 291; cf. Sel. Corr., 254 f.
131. "Left-Wing Communism", quoted by Milliband, *Marxism and Politics*, 123.
132. Original version of "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government", in: *Lenin on Trade Unions*, Moscow 1970, 322.
133. *ibid.*, 330.
134. *ibid.*, 131.
135. *ibid.*, 417.
136. "The Party Crisis", *ibid.*, 405; and Draft Resolution of the Tenth Congress of R.C.P., *ibid.*, 464 f.
137. "The Trade Unions, the Present Situation and Trotsky's Mistakes", *Speech Dec.* 1920, *ibid.*, 376.
138. *ibid.*, 377.
139. *ibid.*, 381 & 403.
140. *ibid.*, 470 ff.
141. *ibid.*, 477.
142. *ibid.*, 416 ff.
143. "Transition to the transition", in *New Left Review* 130, Nov.-Dec. 1981, 67 ff.
144. *ibid.*, 73.
145. *ibid.*, 76.
146. *ibid.*, 78.
147. Quoted by Anderson, *op. cit.*, 208.
148. See *ibid.*, 223 f. & 235 f.
149. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 188 f.
150. *ibid.*, 241.
151. Anderson, *op. cit.*, 226 f.
152. *Prison Notebooks*, 205.
153. *ibid.*, 133.
154. *ibid.*, 243.
155. *ibid.*, 235 ff.
156. *ibid.*, 238 f.
157. M. Albert and R. Hahnel, *Unorthodox Marxism. An Essay on Capitalism, Socialism and Revolution*, South End Press, 1978, 329.
158. N. Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, NLB, London 1978, 253; cf. Rosa Luxemburg *Speaks*, New York, 1970, 391.
159. Poulantzas, *op. cit.*, 256.
160. "Democracy and Parliament", in: *Marxism Today*, June 1982, 21.
161. *ibid.*
162. See Souren Bose, "Modern Anarchism and the Naxalite Movement", *The Marxist Review*, August and September 1981.



163. Communist Manifesto, Sel. Works 1, 108 f.
164. *ibid.*, 118 f.
165. Coll. Works 6, 212.
166. Sel. Works 1, 126 f.
167. Letter of Marx to Kugelmann, Oct. 9, 1866, Sel. Corr., 172.
168. Letter of Marx to Bolte, Nov. 23, 1871, Sel. Corr., 254.
169. Capital I, 703.
170. Ch. 27.
171. Ch. 28.
172. Ch. 31.
173. *ibid.*, 711 f.
174. Capital I, 172.
175. See speech of Marx at Amsterdam, 1872, Sel. Works 2, 293.
176. Two Tactics, Lenin, Sel. Works 1, 459.
177. Sept. 4, 1870, Sel. Correspondence, 233 f.
178. Two Tactics, Lenin, Sel. Works 1, 437.
179. *ibid.*, 457.
180. *ibid.*, 459.
181. Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism, Sel. Works 1, 725.
182. *ibid.*, 728.
183. See E. Fromm, The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness, New York, 1973.
184. See his essay "Violence and Human Self Realisation" in: M. Markovic, The Contemporary Marx, Spokesman Books, 1974, 153 ff.
185. *ibid.*, 159.
186. *ibid.*, 164.
187. *ibid.*, 167.
188. Sel. Works 2, 193 f.
189. Anti-Duehring, 195 f.
190. See Ajit Roy, Aspects of World Politics, Calcutta, 1982, especially 1-4.



## CHAPTER V

# Peripheral Capitalism, Nationalism & Social Revolution

### Introduction

Marxism originated in Europe where capitalism developed first. Capital has an in-built drive to create and dominate the world-market, to subordinate all pre-capitalist economies to its purpose and to transform them in the pursuit of profit. This ruthless, never-ending drive which once employed the means of plunder and colonial conquest operates now mainly through giant global companies, the world market as it is, international institutions like IMF and World-Bank, and the continuing threat of military intervention as at present in Central America. The resistance against this imperialist onslaught has since long found in marxist theory an appropriate theoretical tool and ideological weapon. Marxism has followed capital into all corners of the world, especially after the Russian Revolution which impressed the colonized peoples as an anti-imperialist revolution. Often it came in the form of a dogmatic Marxism-Leninism as it was condified by Stalin. Mao Tse-tung reworked marxist theory in the context of the Chinese revolution. But he also did not escape the fate of dogmatic codification. Nevertheless from all over the world contributions are made to a growing body of independent marxist thought which takes up questions that had been ignored for long, which studies old questions from a new angle, and reflects on the failures and successes of old and new revolutionary struggles. Marxist scholars from all over the world participate in this quest.<sup>1</sup>

For this chapter three topics have been chosen which represent some of the questions which are on the agenda. The debate on the different forms capitalism has taken under the impact of colonialism has advanced very much, especially in India. The question of nationalism has acquired new and crucial dimensions in the time after Marx and Engels in the context of anti-imperialist revolutions and it poses even more difficult problems in the post-colonial era. Finally



some questions regarding the perspective of social revolution in post-colonial societies will be raised, though it is impossible to go into a full-fledged discussion of all the problems involved.

## **1. Peripheral capitalism**

Discussing the post-independence development in India marxists have asked what is the *dominant mode of production*. As capitalism clearly had established itself in the industrial sector the focus of the debate became the question whether capitalism had also penetrated Indian agriculture or whether it was still predominantly feudal or semi-feudal. All participants in the debate agreed that commodity production had been generalised during the colonial period. But not all agreed that this alone would be sufficient to conclude that capitalist relations of production had come into being. They pointed at the continuing existence of tenancy, share-cropping, bonded labour, usury, etc., which reminded of feudal relations of production. The question is which elements are dominant in the social formation of Indian society. Pure capitalism exists only in the theoretical model. In concrete societies, in the "social formation" of a particular country, elements from various modes are combined. That is certainly the case in a complex society as that of India. Are feudal elements still so strong in their own rights that Indian society can be characterised as semi-feudal, as M.L. groups are maintaining, or has the capitalist mode subordinated the still existing pre-capitalist elements and made them serve its own purposes?<sup>2</sup>

In the course of the debate some participants have challenged the terms of reference "feudal", "capitalist" as presupposing and imposing the European model of transition from feudalism to capitalism without taking into consideration the distinct historical experience and the distorting impact of colonialism.

The basic point they make is that whatever capitalist development is taking place it comes after Indian society has been reshaped during two centuries of colonial domination. Neither the capitalist countries of Western Europe nor the Russia about which Lenin wrote his "Development of Capitalism in Russia" had gone through such a period with such incisive consequences. Colonial society differs from pre-capitalist feudalism as well as from metropolitan, imperial capitalism. It has to be analysed on its own terms, for which some of these authors introduced such concepts as "colonial mode of production" or "peripheral capitalism". It is against this background that post-colonial development has to be viewed. This proposition implies a critical evaluation of Marx's views on colonialism.



## a. Marx and Engels on Colonialism

In 1853 Marx wrote his famous articles about British Rule in India for the New-York Daily Tribune. He left no doubt that he condemned the “profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization” which was unveiled in its colonial practices,<sup>3</sup> and he admitted that the suffering and misery following from it were sickening to human feeling.<sup>4</sup> Yet he believed that in spite of all the blood and dirt, this imperial intervention would bring India on the road of *progress*.

*“England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerative—the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia”.*<sup>5</sup>

In other words, colonialism is in India the tool by which capitalism fulfills its historical task of recreating the whole world in its own image. The Manifesto of the Communist Party had evoked the image of the bourgeoisie, constantly revolutionising society, chasing all over the globe, breaking down all walls, creating “universal inter-dependence of nations”, drawing “all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation”.

*“It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image”.*<sup>6</sup>

Capitalism was on its way to become universal. Pre-capitalist nations had no other choice. Either they had to adopt the bourgeois mode of production themselves, or they would be forced by colonialism. The latter was the case in India, the articles of 1853 suggest. Marx had no illusions about the horrors of colonialism.

*“Has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and peoples through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?”*<sup>7</sup>

He sees the “devastating effects of English industry” as “the organic results of the whole system” of capitalist production.<sup>8</sup> Yet Marx expects or projects at the same time a regenerating effect of colonialism in India. The introduction of private property in land and above all the construction of the railways would prepare the way for capitalist industry in India. And political unity, modern education, free press, and a Western-trained Indian army would enable the Indian people to throw off the yoke of colonialism and appropriate its fruits. The yoke was finally thrown off indeed. But marxist-oriented scholars like the



historian Bipan Chandra emphasize that colonialism meanwhile had produced lasting negative results.

The *destruction* effected by colonialism had created conditions not so much for regeneration as for colonial exploitation. The modernisation it introduced and the restructuring it brought resulted in “colonial social relations” and not in “capitalist social relations”.<sup>9</sup> Colonialism did not reproduce capitalism elsewhere, but subjected colonies to the needs of imperialist capital.

Marx himself indicated this rather different effect in the Manifesto. A few lines after speaking of the bourgeoisie creating a world after its own image he wrote:

*“Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West”.*<sup>10</sup>

And in “Capital” he speaks of a “new and international division of labour” which “converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production, for supplying the other part which remains a chiefly industrial field”. One of the examples given is East India.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately Marx did not write the later volumes of “Capital” in which he planned to deal with colonies and world market.

Marx and Engels could not observe colonial reality in India. They were dependent on official and other, rather uncritical reports—the national movement did not yet exist—and on general notions about India and Asia which were prevailing in Europe at the time. They reached different conclusions in a case of colonialism which they could study from close quarters and in a systematic manner, namely in Ireland.<sup>12</sup> Initially they held similar views on *Ireland* as on *India*, but from the mid-sixties onwards after serious study and on the base of direct involvement they found nothing progressive in the role of England’s colonialism, neither in a destructive nor in a regenerative way. They saw the essence of this colonialism in the “subordination of Irish economy to the British economy and the transformation of Ireland into an agrarian appendage of industrial Britain”.<sup>13</sup> And Engels wrote to Marx in 1870:

*“The more I study the subject, the clearer it is to me that Ireland has been stunted in her development by the English invasion and thrown centuries back”.*<sup>14</sup>

Once it was clear that colonialism in Ireland didn’t have any



progressive side whatsoever, Marx and Engels called for resistance and supported the Irish struggle for independence. Later Lenin based his uncompromising rejection of imperialism on this analysis of Marx of the Irish question and developed it further.

Obviously the younger Marx of 1848 and 1853 was misled by a general theory of progress in successive stages to ascribe to colonialism a civilising mission. As Bipan Chandra has shown, this was closely connected with his initial *misunderstanding of Asiatic society* as a stagnant, unchanging and unchangeable society. "Its social condition has remained unaltered since its remotest antiquity".<sup>15</sup> Marx assumed that an underlying structure of isolated village communities based on the unity of agriculture and manufacture determined the perpetual character of Asiatic society. This self-sufficient and self-perpetuating structure needed British steam and science to be destroyed. British interference, he said in 1853, blew up this economical basis "and thus produced the greatest, and, to speak the truth, the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia".<sup>16</sup> And this revolutionary function made colonial interference in India acceptable.

*"The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution".*<sup>17</sup>

However, Marx's assumptions about the unchanging character of Asiatic Society and about India as a society without history and therefore prone to be conquered were completely erroneous. Marxist historians have pointed at the deficient sources of Marx' judgement and have drawn various outlines of Indian history, showing its inner dynamics prior to the British conquest.<sup>18</sup>

Bipan Chandra in his own outline finds something coming "nearest to the popular conception of 'Oriental Despotism' " in the Magdhan State which established its supremacy in Northern and Eastern India around 470 B.C.<sup>19</sup> The village "as an autartic, self-sufficient and isolated economic and administrative unit" emerges at a much later stage, in the period 700 - 1200 A.D. This happened without a centralised state, and after large-scale commodity production had been developed in previous periods.<sup>20</sup> All this contradicts Marx's assumptions. It was in this period that a new class of intermediary landowners got consolidated, which led several Indian Marxist scholars to characterise this period as one of "feudalism". Further economic differentiation and stratification took place in the Mughal period (1556-1757). Some scholars call it feudal, others like Irfan Habib hesitate. Bipan



Chandra emphasises the high level of commodity production and the growth of merchant capital. All agree that this pre-British society had potential for change and had its own class contradictions. Bipan Chandra accordingly reformulates the question:

*"The question is no longer whether Indian society was immutable or not—it was not—but whether it could have on its own, without foreign control, adopted capitalism on the basis of non-colonial contact with the capitalist countries".<sup>21</sup>*

Theoretically Marx accepted such possibility of independent adoption of capitalism in the case of Russia, and Engels compared the fate of Russia with that of India. If Russia had not chosen to introduce steam engines and machinery for modern industrial production, its

*"domestic patriarchal industry would have been destroyed all the same by English machine competition, and the end would have been India, a country economically subject to the great Central Workshop, England".<sup>22</sup>*

Obviously Engels found nothing progressive any more in such a colonial perspective.

*b. Colonial mode of production or peripheral capitalism*

From the debate about successive modes of production in India a picture arises according to which some form of feudalism replaces an earlier tributary mode of production.<sup>23</sup> Kosambi characterises the period immediately preceding British Conquest as one of "feudalism from below". In an earlier phase of "feudalism from above" the emperor or king were raising tribute from subordinate local rulers. By feudalism from below is meant a society "where a class of land-owners developed within the village, between the state and the peasantry" which gradually started wielding power over the local population. The rise of this class was the result of the increase in the number of village communities and the increase in trade.<sup>24</sup>

Kosambi emphasises the difference with European feudalism. Both have in common a low level of technology and division of labour and predominantly production for local needs. The difference is that the unit of settlement in feudal India was the village and not the estate of the feudal lord as in Europe. Kosambi mentions as reason the absence of a slave economy in the earlier period. Only now, at this late stage, slavery is on the increase, though not to the extent that it becomes indispensable to production.<sup>25</sup> Kosambi further notices the absence of guilds and the lack of an organised church as marked differences of the



Indian feudal set-up. "Caste replaced both guild and church, being symptom and cause of a more primitive form of production".<sup>26</sup>

This feudal system under the Mughals was decaying according to Kosambi. In spite of "considerable primitive accumulation" India of this period "was unable to develop a bourgeoisie of its own" He concludes, as Marx, but for other reasons: "The impetus had to come from outside". Kosambi sees the rise of an independent *bourgeoisie* in Mughal India hindered by the fact that the merchants and money-lenders had no support base which could make them independent from the feudal lords on whom they were dependent. The workers' guilds in the medieval cities had provided such a support to the rising bourgeoisie in feudal Europe. But the workers' guilds in India had vanished centuries earlier.

Colonial conquest by capitalist Britain caused a further set-back to the development of an Indian bourgeoisie. In England the merchants were superseded by the industrialists, but in the way of integration not in the way of forced expropriation. In India, however, the merchants of the late feudal period were not integrated into a capitalist set-up, but they were deprived of their trade by the merchants of the East India Company. There were no guilds, no armed forces, no public opinion to come to their aid. "In India, those who had profited by the first equal trade with the East India Company underwent a complete eclipse; many had to become relatively unimportant landlords".<sup>27</sup> Only much later, in the second half of the 19th century, an Indian bourgeois class arose from "the lowly Parsi go-betweens who first turned into capitalists on the British model, followed rapidly by Hindu dalals and money-lenders".<sup>28</sup>

Hamza Alavi focusses attention on other aspects of the impact of colonial conquest. He does not hesitate to call the mode of production in Mughal India feudal. All the characteristics of the feudal mode were there: The peasants were in possession of the means of production, land, etc. But they were under control of the zamindars who had the right to compel them to cultivate all arable land and to bring run-away peasants back by force. Thus they extracted the surplus from this unfree labour by extra-economic compulsion. This power of the village zamindars over the peasant was the foundation of the whole hierarchical power structure of the Moghul empire, which can be compared with the absolutist state in Europe. And finally, there was commodity production, but only as a supplement to the localised economy, in order to pay land revenue. "The surplus drawn off in the form of land revenue was largely consumed; a case of 'simple



reproduction' rather than 'extended reproduction of capital'." <sup>29</sup>

Colonial conquest transformed this feudal set-up and subordinated it to the interests of the capitalist economy of the metropolitan country. The zamindari became legally private owners of the land controlled by them. Land which was not in private hands was appropriated by the state. The zamindar got the land but lost the legal power over the peasants. The landlords had become landowners only. Legally the peasant was now free to leave the zamindar. But economically he had no longer anywhere to go. There was no 'waste land' left on which he could settle. The landowner no longer needed other means of force. Economic necessity compelled the sharecroppers to stay. Thus sharecropping continued to be practiced. On the surface it looked as if nothing had changed. But underneath essential changes had transformed the social relations of production. They were no longer feudal. <sup>30</sup>

Under colonial rule, furthermore, the feudal mode of localised production underwent a radical transformation. Generalised commodity production, a feature of capitalism, developed, but in the distorted way of colonial capitalism. After the improvement of transport through railways and steamships Indian agriculture started producing cotton, jute and indigo for the metropolitan markets and food crops as cash crops for the Indian market. And after the destruction of Indian cotton and silk and other domestic industries a market was created for imports of textiles and other commodities from the metropolis. Using a concept introduced by Samir Amin, <sup>31</sup> Alavi speaks of the *disarticulation* of Indian economy in this process. The integrated whole of the Indian economy was broken down. Its elements were disconnected from each other and separately linked up with the metropolitan economy and re-connected with each other in the colonial economy only via the metropolitan centre. Thus generalised commodity production developed but not as in the imperialist centre, because of that disarticulation. It took a colonial form. <sup>32</sup> The same applies to the transition from simple reproduction to extended reproduction. The extended reproduction did not serve the accumulation of capital in the colonial economy where the surplus value was extracted but in the imperialist centre, contributing to a further deformation of the colonial economy.

In this whole process the colonial state power played a crucial role. This again marks a decisive departure from feudalism with its localised structure of power. The imperialist bourgeoisie "created in the colonies a bourgeois state and bourgeois property and a bourgeois



legal and institutional apparatus" as a necessary complement to its economic domination.<sup>33</sup>

In his 1981 article "Structure of Colonial Formations", Alavi gives a systematic presentation of the differences between the Feudal Mode of Production (FMP), the Capitalist Mode of Production (CMP) and Colonial Mode of Production which he now calls "Peripheral Capitalism".<sup>34</sup> In this comparison he uses five characteristics. (1) The direct producers. In FMP they are in possession of the means of production, but unfree. In CMP they are separated from the means of production, but free of feudal obligations. In Peripheral Capitalism this is as in CMP (but see below on peasant economy). (2) Means of extraction of surplus. In FMP extra-economic force is used to extract surplus. In CMP economic coercion is sufficient to compel the producer to sell his labour power. In Peripheral Capitalism this is as in CMP. (3) Power structure. In FMP economic and political power are fused on the local level at the point of production in the hands of the landlords. In CMP political power (state) is separated from economic power (class). Peripheral Capitalism differs from both in this respect, as state power is in the hands of the imperialist bourgeoisie. (4) Commodity production. The FMP is characterised by a self-sufficient localised economy which is supplemented by simple circulation of commodities. The CMP has generalised commodity production, i.e. production is primarily for sale and labour power itself is a commodity. Peripheral Capitalism differs in this point again from both, as its commodity production is subordinated to the metropolitan market. (5) Reproduction. In FMP there is simple reproduction where surplus is largely consumed. In CMP there is extended reproduction of capital and rise in the organic composition of capital. In Peripheral Capitalism there is extended reproduction, but it is realised outside the periphery in the imperialist centre.

Peripheral capitalism is characterised by the *survival of many pre-capitalist elements*. But these feudal or semi-feudal elements are no longer part of a feudal set-up, they are no longer pre-capitalistic. They have become part of a new set-up. Under these new conditions they have got a different function though they appear to be the same. They no longer serve to reproduce a feudal set-up, but the reproduction of the new mode of peripheral capitalism. Of course, not all pre-capitalist elements are equally useful in the new set-up. Sharecropping, for example, is an obstacle to the capitalist modernisation of agriculture and capitalist development will tend to reduce its occurrence. But bonded labour may be utilised under capitalist conditions. And subsistence production of poor peasants may serve its purpose as well.



Some authors such as Bipan Chandra have emphasised so much the negative impact of colonialism that the *strength of Indian capitalism* as it already developed under colonial conditions could easily be under-estimated. Whatever the restrictions and distortions imposed by British imperialism, significant industrialisation took place and laid the base for capitalist development in independent India.<sup>35</sup> Ajit Roy has repeatedly drawn attention to this peculiar characteristic of Indian development.

*“The one unique feature that distinguishes India from most if not all, of the so-called Third World countries is the fact that even under the British colonial domination, due to many unique historical factors, India had produced a sizable indigenous capitalist class with a significant industrial base, which had even prior to the withdrawal of the British power given birth to a full-fledged monopolistic stratum”.*<sup>36</sup>

In his early studies of Indian monopoly capital, Ajit Roy had characterised it as a “colonial version” of finance capital. It differs “from both metropolitan finance-capital and comprador-bureaucratic-monopoly capital that had developed in China”.<sup>37</sup> The Indian monopolists don’t originate from comprador merchants serving foreign capitalists as in pre-revolutionary China. A large section of the industrial bourgeoisie comes from a mercantile background, but it developed its own industrial base through the fusion of financial and industrial monopolies, “utilising the pressure of the national movement to extort concessions from the imperialist rulers”.<sup>38</sup> In that way of fusion they came to power as the leaders of the Indian bourgeoisie as a whole, and not by robbing the industrial bourgeoisie as the compradores did in China.

After Independence the Indian monopolists used the state power—Five Years Plans—and also foreign capital not as compradores but in order to develop their own industrial base. But they had to face and are increasingly facing unequal conditions in their dealings with metropolitan finance capital. In colonial times Indian monopoly capital had been “conditioned by the domination of British finance capital”.<sup>39</sup> And in post-colonial times it could not achieve full independence. India is not in the grip of one imperialist power. Nor is it completely at the mercy of Multinationals as many other former colonial countries are. But it is structurally dependent on imperialism through its integration into the capitalist world economy. Britain or the USA do not dominate the Indian economy or state. But the mechanisms of the capitalist world economy thwart the full capitalist development of



India.<sup>40</sup> Especially from the sixties onwards dependence on technological and financial collaboration with the much more powerful imperialist finance capital is on the increase.<sup>41</sup> The recent IMF loan indicates the rapid speed in which at present this integration into the imperialist orbit is taking place.

The development of *capitalism in Indian agriculture* has been promoted by the same monopoly bourgeoisie which needed an increase of agricultural productivity as a condition for its industrialisation plans. At the same time it wanted to avoid radical agricultural reforms. Thus it supported the growth of large-scale capitalist farming with technological inputs—"green revolution"—and government programs. As a result the capitalist/kulak strata in the countryside have grown rapidly in economic and political power.<sup>42</sup> This rich farmers class has already replaced the traditional landlords as the dominant force in the countryside. The communist parties are slow in recognising this shift but independent marxist writers as Ajit Roy have been stressing this important change.

Documenting this change Gail Omvedt also comes to the conclusion that Indian agriculture has become dominantly capitalist.

*"Over half the rural population depend on wages for their survival, all cultivators, including middle class and poor peasants, are forced to sell to some extent in the market and their production is governed by the laws of the market; and the means of production in agriculture are now significantly produced industrially, acquired through the market, and monopolised by those who depend on the exploitation of labour power".*<sup>43</sup>

Capitalism is progressing, but again in a thwarted form. Certain pre-capitalist forms are decreasing under its impact. Tenancy for example is declining. But on the other hand *subsistence farming* by middle and poor peasants is surviving along with the modern agricultural sector. Classical marxism rather expected the complete disintegration of the peasantry under the impact of capitalist transformation of agriculture. It would create a rural bourgeoisie on the one hand and a rural proletariat on the other hand. Following the pattern of capitalist industry there would be a class of capitalist farmers and a class of agricultural labourers. Lenin came to realise that the "middle peasants" did not disappear so quickly.<sup>44</sup> And present-day marxists are facing the persistence of petty peasant production in many of the former colonised societies.

Alavi argues that this tenacious peasant economy can be



understood as a functional part of peripheral capitalism, rather than explaining it in terms of imperialism maintaining this as a pre-capitalist element for its own purposes. The pre-capitalist basis of peasant production and reproduction has been destroyed in the time of colonialism. The imposition of taxes forced the peasants to produce for the market. The traditional access to land for new settlements—part of the reproduction of the peasant economy—was denied by the colonial state. The destruction of peasant manufacturing was the final blow to the self-sufficiency of the peasant economy. Peasant life may not have changed much, so to see, but in the process the peasant economy had become part of the structure of peripheral capitalism.

As it is the peasantry has a precarious existence. But the peasants have greater staying power than the petty producers in the towns, because their food and shelter are secured to some extent before they go to the market to make some money. Yet they need to supplement the family income by outside employment. Exactly this tenacious struggle for survival on a piece of land serves the purposes of peripheral capitalism, as it provides reservoirs of cheap labour power.<sup>45</sup> As peasants they don't produce much for the market, but as sellers of labour-power they lower the cost of reproduction of labour and thus the level of wages. The peasant households, especially the *women*, bear the costs of the reproduction of future labour by raising the children, and they also take care of the existing labour power in times of non-employment because of illness or unemployment. Costs of school-education, health facilities and other social provisions can be left out in the calculation of the wages by capital. In this perspective the traditional labour of peasant-women both in the field and in the household is subsumed under capital, serving its extended reproduction by reproducing the labour-power needed for it at the cheapest rate possible.

Gail Omvedt explains in a similar way the remarkable phenomenon that even the agricultural labourer families are not completely landless. She quotes figures which indicate that landlessness has declined from 22.0 per cent in 1953-54 to 9.6 per cent in 1971-72. The tiny landholdings of proletarian and semi-proletarian families function as "a cushion, which helps to dampen their desperation and—just as important—cheapen their labour power". She places this in the larger context of the imperialist economy which forces Indian industry to compete on a high technological level in the world market. As a consequence it can employ only a small proportion of the total labour force. The informal or unorganised sector can provide employment to a larger proportion as long as it can get away with the miserably low



wages it is paying. This again is possible with the subsistence labour of poor peasants and "landed proletarians" in the background.<sup>46</sup>

### c. *The Colonial and Post-Colonial State*

We turn once more to Bipan Chandra who has elaborated on the specific character of the colonial state.<sup>47</sup> Obviously the state plays a much greater role in all possible respects in the colonial system than in the capitalist society of the metropolitan centre. Here it is not the power of one class of society oppressing other classes. In this case it is "the instrument for oppressing entire societies",<sup>48</sup> an instrument used by the bourgeois state of the metropolis. Of course, there are collaborating elements inside the colony, compradore bourgeois, feudal landlords and the like. They are rewarded for their co-operation, but they don't get a share in the state power. That is the difference with semi-colonies as pre-revolutionary China where compradors and landlords did not have a share in state power.

In the colonial economy the control over the state is the pre-condition for restructuring the economy and creating the colonial mode of production. The colonial state "directly undertakes the economic, social, cultural, political, and legal transformation of the colony so as to make it reproductive on an extended scale".<sup>49</sup>

The function of the state differs in the various stages of Colonialism. Bipan Chandra distinguishes three stages. The first stage is the period of *monopoly trade and revenue appropriation*. At this stage there is no attempt to "develop" or change the existing economy, but to bring it under effective control for the purpose of exploitation. The colonial power is superimposed on the "existing economic, social, cultural, ideological and political structures". The only changes are in the field of military organization and technology and at the top of the administration. This was sufficient to establish a buyer's monopoly in the purchase of the Colony's products, and to appropriate the surplus in the form of revenue. The direct seizure of surplus served to finance the colonial state, its army and its wars, it served the purchase of colonial products, and it served, of course, as a source of profit to the merchants, corporations, and the exchequer of the metropolis".<sup>50</sup>

The second stage is characterised by *exploitation through trade*. The essence of this stage is "the making of the colony into a subordinate trading partner which would export raw materials and import manufactures".<sup>51</sup> This implied the destruction of the existing economic, political, social, cultural and ideological setting and its replacement by a new set-up. It meant the integration of the colonial



economy with the metropolitan economy in ways which have been discussed already. It required major changes in the political and judicial sphere. The capitalist legal and judicial system was introduced at least in the area of criminal law, law of contract and civil law. Colonial administration had to become more detailed and comprehensive. Modern education was needed.

All these incisive changes were justified with a liberal imperialist political ideology. The previous stage was criticised for its outright plunder, the new policies were proclaimed to bring the benefits of development and modernisation or of western civilisation. Liberal and radical democrats in the metropolitan countries were even talking of training the colonial people for democracy and self-government. Bipan Chandra notices that this progressive sounding ideology of development which basically served the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie in the metropolitan centre one century ago has much in common with the ideology of development and modernization which has been propagated since the Second World War.

The bold promises of development could not be realised. The colonial state could not carry the double burden of a large repressive and bureaucratic apparatus and of its 'developmental' functions. The permanent crisis in the colonial budget led to heavy taxation and little development. As discussed already, underdevelopment was the outcome of the incisive changes brought about by colonial rule in this stage. The third stage is characterised as the era of *foreign investments and international competition for colonies*. It was the period of increased competition between the major imperialist powers with its struggle for secure markets and sources of agricultural and mineral raw materials. Moreover colonies were considered to provide possibilities for capital export. In reality this and other economic benefits turned out to be less than expected, mainly because the colonial economies had been wrecked in the previous stages. Yet none of the imperialist powers wanted to risk to stay behind in the construction of colonial empires. Of course, this meant a further intensification of political and administrative control over the colony. "The administration... became more bureaucratic, detailed and efficient".<sup>52</sup>

While the colonial state saw further expansion and perfecting, the *ideology of colonialism* underwent major changes. The liberal imperialist ideology of the previous period was replaced by an imperialist ideology which justified despotism—supposedly of a benevolent nature—with the assumption of racial, social and cultural inferiority of the colonized peoples. They were no longer believed to



be able to emulate the advanced nations in the course of time. They were considered to be permanently unfit for self-government, 'child' peoples in need of permanent trusteeship. The racial and national chauvinism of imperialist ideology in this epoch also served the purpose to counter the growing challenge of democratic and socialist movements in the centre. Imperial glory was offered to unite the people there behind its bourgeoisie—a taste of it was recently once more given in the Falklands conflict. On the other hand the colonial state tries to prevent the emerging national unity in the colony by promoting segmentation and fragmentation along the dividing lines of caste, tribe and religious community. While practising this "divide and rule" it claims on the ideological level that only colonial rule can maintain law and order or peace among these warring communities.

The three stages mentioned by Chandra provide a general framework for the periodisation of colonial policies. However, there are significant differences between colonialism in the Americas, in Asia and the Arab world, and in Black Africa. Samir Amin has explained these differences as the result of the fact that these areas were integrated at different stages of capitalist development at the centre.<sup>53</sup>

The rather highly developed apparatus of the colonial State through which the imperialist power had exercised its rule was inherited by the independent states that emerged after the Second World War in the former colonies. The legal and institutional framework is that of the bourgeois state. But this post-colonial bourgeois state differs from the post-feudal bourgeois state analysed by classical marxist theory.<sup>54</sup>

The difference is that this state is created not by the rising national bourgeoisie but by the metropolitan bourgeoisie in the colonial epoch. As it was geared to exercise control over all social classes it has an over-developed *bureaucratic-military apparatus*, whereas the mechanisms of representation and democratic control are underdeveloped. From the very beginning, therefore, the post-colonial state tends to give large scope to a dominant role of bureaucratic and military oligarchies.

This relative autonomy of the state is enhanced by its "mediatory role" between the competing interests of the three propertied classes, namely the domestic bourgeoisie, the metropolitan bourgeoisies and the land-owning classes".<sup>55</sup> In the post-colonial situation these three classes are no longer bound to fight each other as they had to in the colonial situation. Their "mutual relations are no longer antagonistic and contradictory; rather they are mutually competing and reconcilable".<sup>56</sup>

The assumption of marxist theory has been that the "national



*bourgeoisie*” which in the struggle for independence fought against the coalition of metropolitan bourgeoisie, native ‘comprador’ bourgeoisie and ‘feudal’ landowning class would have to complete its bourgeois-democratic, anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution with the help of the post-colonial state. But what happened after independence is that the propertied classes united against workers and peasants. This unity was possible, Alavi asserts, because their interests were no longer antagonistic. The bourgeoisie didn’t need to subordinate feudal power in order to establish the nation state. It inherited the bourgeois state ready-made and could utilise the alliance with the “*feudal*” *landowning class* to establish links with the power-structures in the rural areas, while introducing some moderate land reforms and stimulating the growth of capitalist farming not against but in co-operation with the big landowners.

The relationship to the imperialist bourgeoisie also loses its antagonistic character. While the ‘comprador’ merchants and contractors may start seeking protectionist measures, the “national” bourgeoisie begins to enter into collaboration with metropolitan capital in order to get access to advanced technology, a relationship in which it becomes increasingly dependent. The bureaucracy or the bureaucratic-military oligarchy mediates between these competing interests and obviously this serves neo-colonialism well.

By another route Patankar and Omvedt reach a similar conclusion that the distinction between “*national*” and “*comprador*” is no longer valid for the post-colonial period, that the peripheral countries are economically under indirect imperialist domination, whereas their bourgeoisies and the State remain politically independent. They argue that the local bourgeoisie though being the ruling class “cannot complete the democratic revolution, cannot carry through an agrarian revolution, cannot escape from dependence on imperialism, and cannot wipe out feudal or other pre-capitalist relations in the social formation”. They ascribe this to the mechanisms of “internalisation”, or incorporation of the local bourgeoisie in the transnational framework, and of “disarticulation” which post-colonial imperialism uses.<sup>57</sup>

These propositions are part of attempts to develop a general theory of the state in post-colonial societies. But there are, of course, significant differences from country to country. Alavi accounts for that when he states that India comes nearest to a case in which state power is controlled by a political party in a capitalist post-colonial society.<sup>58</sup>



This is, of course, based on the fact that a strong Indian bourgeoisie developed already in colonial times, led the independence struggle, and could afford to maintain a *parliamentary set-up* thanks to its hegemonic position. In this respect India differs from almost all other post-colonial societies. Even so the situation is ambiguous. "The ruling Congress Party is by no means a party of a single class; it participates with the bureaucracy in mediating the demands of competing propertied classes" and the Indian bureaucracy also enjoys a wide margin of autonomy.<sup>59</sup>

The parties of the Left differ on the question which classes and sections are in control of the state in India.<sup>60</sup> The State in India is according to the CPI "the organ of the class rule of the national bourgeoisie as a whole, in which the big bourgeoisie holds powerful influence. This class rule has strong links with the landlords". According to CPI (ML) big comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie and big landlords are the ruling classes which preserve the semi-feudal set-up and turn India into a neo-colony of U.S. imperialism and Soviet social-imperialism. The CPI (M) position differs from both. It sees the Indian state as the organ of the class rule of the bourgeoisie and the landlords, led by the big bourgeoisie, who are increasingly collaborating with foreign finance capital in the pursuit of a capitalist path of development.

Ajit Roy has given a critical analysis of these positions in his paper "Sharers in Indian State Power".<sup>61</sup> He shows that the Indian bourgeoisie basically had overcome the feudal forces—as sharers in state power—with the armed intervention in Hyderabad in 1948 and with the dethronement of the princes, whatever concessions in the form of purses they may have got. The power of the semi-feudal landlords was curbed in the drawn out process of land reform legislations, whatever again the loopholes and concessions. A new class of agricultural bourgeoisie took the place of the semi-feudal landlords. It rose from different strata, including former landlords, rich peasants and other elements. It benefitted most from the land reforms and was fostered by other state policies as well and has come to share power at the state level. The dominant force, however, in Ajit Roy's analysis, is another section of the bourgeoisie, namely the monopoly bourgeoisie, which operates at the national level and controls much of industry, banking, commerce, media and party financing.

Two other sections of the bourgeoisie are more or less out in the cold as far as a share in state power is concerned according to Ajit Roy. The big industrial bourgeoisie which operates on state level depends



on the monopoly bourgeoisie for finance and supports moves towards greater autonomy for the states. The small industrial bourgeoisie has no access to state power at all, is starved of finance, raw materials, etc., and has potential sympathies towards the left.

In summary, the Indian state is not an organ of the whole bourgeoisie (CPI), nor of big bourgeoisie and landlords (CPI-M), nor of imperialists (CPI-ML), but of monopoly and rural bourgeoisie, with the former in the leading position.

This identification of the rural bourgeoisie—the rich farmers—as one of the ruling classes of the Indian State is of crucial political relevance. The limitation of Ajit Roy's critique may be that he remains within an instrumentalist framework—the state as organ—and accordingly focusses on a possible showdown between the two uneasy allies. A further analysis of the mediating role of the bureaucracy in the Indian set-up would enlarge the framework and widen the scope for the consideration of other possible scenarios.

So far parliamentary democracy has provided legitimacy to the Indian State. The permanent economic crisis has not yet thrown up a military-bureaucratic-technocratic regime as in other Asian countries. The doctrine of national security is not yet the official state ideology as in most of Latin America. But the militarisation of society is growing, a 'National Security Act' is in force and the repressive role of the State is on the increase. It depends on the intervention of the organised masses from below whether this expanding authoritarian interventionism can be stopped.<sup>61a</sup>

## **2. The National Question**

### *a. Marx and Engels*

The struggle for national liberation in the colonial countries in Asia and Africa in the 20th century has confronted marxist revolutionaries with the national question in a qualitatively new way as compared to Marx and Engels in the 19th century in Europe. The founding fathers actually did not leave behind a systematic theory of the national question with precise definitions and general principles. Most of their relevant remarks in this respect are made in the context of concrete political issues and not in a theoretical framework.

Only in the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" do we find a more general statement of their approach to this question. The passage starts with the provocative statement: "*The working men have no country*".<sup>62</sup> This means two things. Firstly it says that the workers were



yet excluded from their nations, as they had no voice, no power, and thus no stake in their countries. It was the bourgeoisie who formed the "nation" or the "people". The bourgeois revolution had abolished the feudal concept of the state as the personal property of the monarch and had proclaimed the principle of national or popular sovereignty. Power originated from the people - their revolutionary theory said, but the people were the property owning middle classes. They alone qualified for full citizenship with all rights. Thus the bourgeoisie inherited the nations from the kings and the workers were still without country.<sup>63</sup>

From this exclusion follows that the first task of the workers is to conquer their countries, to become national by becoming the leading class, as the next sentence in the Manifesto puts it.

*"Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself **the** nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word".*<sup>64</sup>

This concept of the proletariat as a *national class* is very important as the class struggle first takes a national form.

But the outcome of that struggle, the victorious proletarian revolution, will lead beyond the nation to a socialist or communist world in which the nation-state no longer exists and national differences no longer matter. That is the second, deeper meaning of the statement that the workers have no country. The Manifesto bases this expectation on the development of the world-market and free trade.

*"National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world-market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto".*<sup>65</sup>

And this development, especially that of large-scale industry has "created a class which in all nations has the same interest and with which nationality is already dead", as it is put in "German Ideology".<sup>66</sup> The Manifesto appeals to these "common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality",<sup>67</sup> as is known from the rallying call at its conclusion: "Working men of all countries, unite!"<sup>68</sup> In this unity, in this *proletarian internationalism*, they have nothing to lose but their chains and a world to win.

The Manifesto leaves no doubt, marxists and communists are



internationalists. The nation, the country, the independent state are important at a particular stage of the struggle, but they are not of final and lasting significance. They are only a step towards the fundamental goal of world-wide communism. Thus marxists cannot be nationalists in the sense that they would subordinate everything else to the interests of the nation, whatever that may be. For them the national question is a pragmatic political question rather than a question of life and death and of final commitment.

Before illustrating the pragmatic approach of Marx and Engels to the national question in their time, it is necessary to explain the difference between the 19th century nationalism in Europe and present-day nationalism all over the world. The doctrine of *national self-determination* was a consequence of the doctrine of popular sovereignty as proclaimed by the French Revolution. This doctrine of self-determination did originally not serve a process of secession but of *unification*. It did not stimulate each and every national minority to fight for its own independent state, but it helped to forge strong nation-states which absorbed separatist movements into larger units. Great Britain included the Welsh, the Scots and the English. The French Revolution destroyed the "remnants of Breton, Norman and Provençal separatism". Germany and Italy consisted of a variety of kingdoms and principalities. Nationalism aimed at the reunification of Italians and Germans in larger national states. Marx could see this type of national unification as part of the development dictated by capitalist production with its need for larger markets.

However, from 1848 onwards other nationalities started demanding national self-determination at the cost of such larger units: The Czechs wanted to opt out of German unity, the Slovenes challenged Italian unity, the Irish sought independence from Britain. Ruthenians, Slovaks, Croats raised their voice. There was a "shift from the conception of individual self-determination... to the conception of nationality as an objective right of nations to independent statehood... The rights of man envisaged by the French revolution were transferred to nation". The right of an individual to choose to what state he shall belong is changed into the right of a nation to constitute itself as an independent state.<sup>69</sup> All schools of thought agreed that "the line must be drawn somewhere. Claims to national independence could not be indefinitely multiplied". The question was which *criteria* to choose and to use in order to decide whether a claim for national self-determination should be supported or not.

Marx and Engels firstly favoured national movements which would



lead to the formation of large and powerful units and they usually opposed movements which would lead to the break-up of large states into smaller ones. Secondly, they tended to support the national claims of "countries in which bourgeois development was well advanced", whereas they were inclined to consider the nationalism of backward peasant nations as reactionary, because it would hamper progressive economic development. Thirdly, Marx and Engels asked how a claim for national independence would affect the Russian Empire. If it would weaken this champion of European reaction, as in the case of Poland, they supported. If it would serve the Russian interests as in the case of the Czechs, they opposed. On the whole they followed practical political considerations.<sup>70</sup>

In a speech on Poland Engels coined the slogan:

*"A nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations. The liberation of Germany cannot therefore take place without the liberation of Poland from German oppression".*<sup>71</sup>

However, this insight did not mean that Marx and Engels would support each and every claim for national self-determination. It might be taken as historical irony that several of the present states in Eastern Europe of which Marx and Engels are supposed to be the god-fathers did not qualify for an independent historical role in their eyes more than 100 years ago. They held that only the Poles and the Magyars (Hungarians) played a revolutionary role and would be able to form viable states, and they assumed that the other nationalities should be absorbed by Germany, Poland and Hungary.<sup>72</sup> To justify this approach Engels occasionally fell back on a pet theory of Hegel about "historyless peoples" which have a common language but did not manage in history to form a state and therefore would not qualify for national independence.

But mainly this has to be ascribed to the complex political situation. The national aspirations of the Czechs and others at that time contributed indeed politically to the defeat of the democratic revolution against the Austro-Hungarian monarchy of the Habsburg empire. Yet these national movements were also aiming at viable states, eventually including more than one nationality. Present day Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia are based not only on the dissolving of the Habsburg Empire but also on the uniting of several nationalities into one state.<sup>73</sup>

In the aftermath of the 1848 revolution Marx concluded that the



national revolutions were dependent on the proletarian revolution. The defeat of the French proletariat in June 1848 led to the defeat of the national uprisings elsewhere in Europe.

*"The Hungarian shall not be free, nor the Pole, nor the Italian, as long as the worker remains a slave!"*<sup>74</sup>

In the 1860's however, Marx started reconsidering the national question. The First International (1864-1872) in which Marx was going to play a leading role came into being as the result of the growing spirit of internationalism among the working class especially in Britain and France. The first issue on which they came together was the Polish insurrection of 1863 in which Marx also was deeply interested.<sup>75</sup> As a consequence the *right of self-determination* got included into the programme of the International. One of its articles reads:

*"It is urgently necessary to annihilate the growing influence of Russia in Europe by assuring to Poland the right of self-determination which belongs to every nation and by giving to this country once more a social and democratic foundation."*<sup>76</sup>

Within the International Marx strongly opposed the view of the French followers of Proudhon "that all nationalities and even nations were 'antiquated prejudices' ". He was too much of a historical realist to believe in their anarchistic schemes of small groups and communes leaving out the historically grown entities of nations. And he challenged his future son-in-law Lafargue to ponder whom else this "negation of nationalities" would serve than the existing nations such as France.<sup>77</sup>

A turn in Marx's views of the national and colonial question can be noticed most clearly, as mentioned already, in his changing position on the Irish question. As he expresses himself in a letter to Engels:

*"For a long time I believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working-class ascendancy... Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will **never accomplish anything** until it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland."*<sup>78</sup>

Thus it is no longer the Irish who have to wait for the English proletariat to move into action, but the Irish national emancipation becomes a precondition for the successful revolution in England. The reasons given for this change in perspective, however, are not abstract principles of national rights, but the interests of the English proletariat. It will be able to overthrow the landed oligarchy in England only after



the Irish have made their agrarian revolution which will deprive the English landlords of their Irish base.<sup>79</sup> Once the Irish have "self-government and independence from England" such an agrarian revolution would not be difficult, "because in Ireland, it is not merely a simple economic question but at the same time a *national* question, for the (English) landlords there are not, like those in England, the traditional dignitaries representatives of the nation, but its mortally hated oppressors."<sup>80</sup>

The over-riding perspective is and remains the social revolution to be carried out by the English proletariat. But for this the proletariat needs to dissociate itself from the oppression of other nations and to extend its solidarity to such movements for national independence which will undercut the hold of the ruling class in its own country. Such a perspective became the *basis for the international solidarity with national liberation struggles* in the Third International.

In the period of the Second International (1889-1914) the national question acquired new dimensions. Germany and Italy had achieved national unity and especially the German Empire was eager to join the league of imperialist nations. In Western Europe *nationalism became an ideological tool of imperialism*. On the other hand, the voice of anti-imperialist national protest in the colonized countries was not yet strong, while the struggle of oppressed nationalities in eastern Europe drew attention mainly of Russian and Austrian Marxists. The clearest statement of the Second International itself is contained in a resolution of the London Congress of 1896:

*The congress declares in favour of the full autonomy of all nationalities, and its sympathies with the workers of any country at present suffering under the yoke of military, national, or other despotisms; and calls upon the workers in all such countries to fall into line, side by side with the class-conscious workers of the world, to organize for the overthrow of international capitalism and the establishment of international social-democracy.*"<sup>81</sup>

National "autonomy" in the english translation is equated with self-determination in other languages. This is affirmed in the context of the international solidarity of the proletariat.

However, when the world war broke out in 1914, it turned out that the great majority of the proletariat of the leading capitalist countries opted for the bourgeois imperialist nationalism of their respective countries. The appeal of this sort of nationalism had been severely underestimated. The career of August Bebel, one of the main leaders



of German Social-Democracy, may illustrate how gradually the internationalism had been undermined as the working class, thanks to its electoral and organisational success, found itself no longer completely excluded from national life. Bebel had opposed Bismarck's German Reich. He had voted against the war credits in 1871. But after 35 years of Hohenzollern rule he declared in 1904 at the Amsterdam Congress of the Second International that the monarchy had brought "national unity" and that the Fatherland was the same for the working class as for the other social classes since all lived on the same soil, spoke the same language and had the same customs.<sup>82</sup> Ten years later only one of 111 SPD members voted against the war credits for the German empire, Karl Liebknecht. Only he and Rosa Luxemburg called for a frontal attack on the bourgeois ideology of nationalism.

The SPD supporters of the war had argued that the "civilization and the independence of our people" had to be defended against Russian despotism and this would be in harmony with the International, which has always recognised the right of every people to its national independence."<sup>83</sup> Rosa Luxemburg agrees "that socialism gives to every people the 'right of independence and the freedom of independent control of its own destinies.'"<sup>84</sup> But she denies that imperialist powers such as Germany under its military autocracy or Britain with its rule over India can invoke the right of national self-determination.

*"To the socialist, no nation is free whose national existence is based upon the enslavement of another people, for to him colonial peoples too are human beings, and, as such, parts of the national state. International socialism recognizes the right of free independent nations, with equal rights. But socialism alone can create such nations, can bring self-determination of their peoples."*<sup>85</sup>

As a consequence Rosa Luxemburg demanded all-out struggle against nationalist ideology.

*"The immediate mission of socialism is the spiritual liberation of the proletariat from the tutelage of the bourgeoisie, which expresses itself through the influence of nationalist ideology... The sole defence of all real national independence is at present the revolutionary class struggle against imperialism. The workers' fatherland, to the defence of which all else must be subordinated, is the socialist International."*<sup>86</sup>

Lenin welcomed the Junius pamphlet without knowing the identity



of the author. But he corrected it especially on the question of "national war". He agreed that the world war was an imperialist war, but he warned against ignoring the possibility and even inevitability of national movements against imperialism. Rosa Luxemburg like the Marx of 1848 thought that everything depended on the proletarian revolution. Lenin like the Marx of 1866 and after saw the progressive potential both of the national movements in Eastern Europe and of the "national wars waged by colonies and semicolonies" which he considered to be inevitable.<sup>87</sup>

*b. Lenin and the question of nationalities*

The question of nationalities was very urgent in Central and Eastern Europe. Both the Russian Empire and the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary counted many nationalities in their vast territories. The Russian Empire was called a "prison of nations". Marxist revolutionaries in Russia, Poland and Austria had to come to grips with the question whether they should support the strivings for national independence of these nationalities or whether they should oppose it in the name of proletarian internationalism. There were various approaches and especially the one followed by Lenin has had great influence on the stand later generations of marxists have taken elsewhere. It is important to understand the historical context in which Lenin's doctrine regarding the right of national self-determination has evolved.

The Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party has recognized the right of national self-determination from the beginning, at its first and second congresses in 1898 and 1903. Lenin entered into a deeper and more intensive study of the question in 1912 when he started living in Austrian Poland. It confronted him not only with the problem of the division of Poland which was split up under Russia, Austria and Germany, but it also forced him to take a stand on the theoretical approach both of the Austrian Marxists, especially Otto Bauer, and of some Polish marxists, especially Rosa Luxemburg. The *Austrian marxists* were afraid that the right of self-determination would split up the shaky Dual Monarchy into too many small national units. These small nation-states would not only have economic problems, but there would still be national minorities, because the various nationalities were not living in neatly separated territories but all mixed up. They therefore proposed to work for a non-territorial cultural autonomy for all national groups throughout the empire instead of going for separate states. They favoured a "federation of nationalities" and re-organized the Austrian Social-Democratic party accordingly as a federation of six"



autonomous national parties — German, Czech, Polish, Ruthenian, Italian and Yugoslav. The Jewish marxists in Russia had fought for a similar set-up in the Russian party. Lettish and Caucasian social-democrats also started demanding autonomy for national sections.<sup>88</sup>

Lenin opposed both, the splitting of the party along national lines and the splitting of the state on the basis of national autonomy. Such an approval would treat the nation as a permanent phenomenon which would even continue to divide the socialist world. For him, as for Marx, the national question was not an absolute but a historical question. It was left to the Georgian Bolshevik Stalin to write in 1913 his much quoted article against the Austrian thesis "The National Question and Social-Democracy", in which he gives the following definition of nation:

*"A nation is an historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture."*<sup>89</sup>

He includes the aspect of common territory, something which the Austrians left out, and he emphasizes that nation is a historical phenomenon which belongs to the epoch of rising capitalism. Nation has not always been there and it will not always be there. It is the bourgeoisie which leads the struggle for the creation of the nation as it tries to establish the domestic market.

Rosa Luxemburg and some other Polish Social-Democrats concluded from the bourgeois character of the struggle for independent nations that the proletariat should not support such struggles. They rejected in the name of proletarian internationalism the demand for the restoration of the Polish State as a bourgeois concern which was of no interest to the proletariat. This position was also opposed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Firstly Lenin argues that the period of bourgeois-democratic revolution in Eastern Europe and Asia had only started in 1905. In its course there is "the awakening of a whole series of bourgeois-democratic national movements which strive to create nationally independent and nationally uniform states."<sup>90</sup> Such an historical phase cannot be ignored or skipped.

Secondly, there is the crucial fact that Russia was a state with a single national centre — Great Russia — which dominates and oppresses the majority of the population belonging to other nationalities and colonized peoples in border regions. The Russian proletariat as the proletariat of a ruling nation cannot deny the right of self-determination to oppressed nations. That would violate the principle of equality among



nations and would serve the interests of the imperialist ruling class.

At this point it becomes clear how Lenin links the revolutionary struggle for socialism with a revolutionary programme on the national question.<sup>91</sup> It is *part of the democratic demand* for political and civil liberties and complete equality. It supports the struggle against oppression and all inequalities and injustices imposed by the oppressing nation. It demands the abolition of all privileges for any nation or language. That implies the right to self-determination and secession by democratic methods. By the same criteria it opposes all attempts of the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation to establish new privileges and to fortify nationalism beyond the struggle against oppression in a new exclusivism. "The proletariat is opposed to all privileges, to all exclusiveness."<sup>92</sup> It therefore demands equal rights for *all* nations. It follows that the proletariat while supporting struggles against national oppression should keep its independence in relationships to its own bourgeoisie and should foster unity with the proletariat of other nationalities, opposing all nationalist exclusivism in the spirit of proletarian internationalism.

*'Working class democracy contraposes to the nationalist wranglings of the various bourgeois parties over questions of language, etc., the demand for the unconditional unity and complete amalgamation of workers of **all** nationalities in **all** working class organizations... in contra-distinction to any kind of bourgeois nationalism. Only this type of unity and amalgamation can uphold democracy and defend the interests of the workers against capitalism which is already international and becoming more so'*<sup>93</sup>

Lenin and the other Bolsheviks stressed the importance of the right to self-determination with reference to the "special concrete, historical features of the national question in Russia."<sup>94</sup> They never held that this right had absolute validity. They were convinced that the struggle against national oppression was a passing phase of the bourgeois revolution. Capitalist development itself was leading to the breaking down of national barriers and thus prepared the way for proletarian internationalism.

Lenin seems to have based this optimism on the assumption that *cultural identity* is primarily determined by class and socio-political outlook. He speaks of "two national cultures in every national culture", a bourgeois culture and at least the elements of democratic and socialist culture". The international culture of the working class movement would appropriate only the latter and leave out bourgeois culture and whatever "reactionary and clerical culture" may have survived.<sup>95</sup>

This optimism about the fading away of national questions has not



been endorsed by historical developments, neither in the world of international capital nor in the bloc of socialist countries. It is true of course, that nationalism is employed by ruling classes to divide the working class, to exclude and to oppress. But in order to do so there must be something to which they can appeal. And obviously there is in language and culture as they have grown in history more common ground than the assumption of two separable cultures recognises. To whom belongs the language, the ancient heritage of architecture, poetry, the memory of ancient battles, etc? Everywhere the shaping role of class-domination can be traced. Yet class-barriers are transcended in the cultural heritage. Socialist countries have recognized this by caring for their national heritage in a less reductionist way, and the Chinese communists have acknowledged that the wholesale destruction of the cultural heritage was not "cultural revolution" but cultural barbarism. However, Lenin and his comrades had not much time to ponder the cultural aspects of the national question. Their main concern was the political aspect. And it is on that level that their approach has influenced history.

The test of the Bolshevik doctrine of national self-determination came in 1917 and the years after. The Tsarist regime collapsed and it looked as if the whole empire with its more than 200 peoples and languages would disintegrate. Initially the Soviet government controlled only parts of the central Great-Russian territory. And yet 4 years later most of the peoples and regions which had been part of the Tsarist empire were re-united under Soviet power and soon formed the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. And this came about while the Bolsheviks after coming to power had continued to proclaim and up to a point to practice the right of self-determination.

This proclamation and its application in the recognition of the independence of Finland, Poland and the Baltic states had won the confidence of other non-Russian nationalities. They became allies of the Bolsheviks in the Civil War as they naturally opposed the counter-revolutionary attempts to restore the Russian Empire. Lenin insisted against hesitating comrades that the affirmation of the principle of secession was the only means to reconstitute the former unity, "not by force, but by voluntary agreement".<sup>96</sup> The Civil War drove them together and underlined the need for reunification on a new basis. In some cases independent republics were recognised, but increasingly intervention in some form took place to prevent separation. It was stressed that the right to secede does not mean the duty to do so, no more than the right to divorce implies the obligation to break up the marriage.



As Soviet power got consolidated by 1920-21 more and more emphasis was given to the “right to unite” instead of the “right to separate”. Not only economic and military factors were pushing towards unity, also ideological reasons played a role. The principle of proletarian internationalism with its final goal of unity — “workers of all countries unite” — demanded now to concentrate all efforts on creating the conditions for real unity.

The decisive condition was to remove all traces of inequality and discrimination of the past, which was actually based on a structure of internal colonialism, through the provision of aid to the backward nations and through a spreading of industrialisation over the whole territory, in an attempt to break down the dividing line between industrial and agricultural nations. In this respect Soviet policy tried to create within its borders an alternative to capitalism that with its division of labour between industrial nations and backward or colonial nations cannot create equality between nations. As the non-marxist historian of the Bolshevik Revolution, E.H. Carr, puts it:

*“the conception of reunion in a socialist order between really and not merely formally equal nations was a bold and imaginative attempt to break the deadlock.”<sup>97</sup>*

However, this was a long-term process and meanwhile other factors were hampering the process of equalisation. The main problem was the dominant role of the Great-Russians who constituted almost half of the population and inhabited the heartland of Russia. The concentration of power at the centre enhanced their dominant role. Even non-Russians, like the Georgian Stalin would be inclined to assimilate to the Great-Russian set-up. Bureaucratic standards and mentality followed almost automatically Great-Russian patterns. Apart from the bureaucracy, Red Army and Trade Unions were central and centralising institutions which promoted unavoidably the Great-Russian element spreading all over. The same is true of the unifying role of the Communist Party. These factors were behind the phenomenon of “Great-Russian chauvinism” which worried Lenin so much in the last years of his life. Even marxist doctrine contributed indirectly to it through its emphasis on the leading role of the industrial proletariat. At least in the early years the proletariat was in majority Great-Russian whereas the other nationalities were predominantly or exclusively of peasant composition.<sup>98</sup>

It was Lenin’s deepening worry about “Great-Russian chauvinism” in the approach of some of the Bolshevik leaders towards non-Russian peoples which made him engage in the last political battle of his life. In



1922 moves were made to settle the question of the relationship between the Russian Federation (RSFSR) and the other republics (the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia). Stalin proposed an "autonomization plan" which provided for the inclusion of these "independent Republics" in the Russian Federation as "autonomous Republics" under the government of the RSFSR.<sup>99</sup> Lenin who was already ill supported and stimulated opposition against this plan and achieved that it was changed into a proposal for a "formal union with the RSFSR within the framework of a Union of the Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia". The point was, he wrote to Kamenev, that we join "on an equal footing in a new Union, a new Federation", that we don't destroy their independence but establish a "Federation of Republics with equal rights".<sup>100</sup> How serious Lenin was about this becomes clear from another note sent to Kamenev, in which he says: "I declare war to the death on dominant-nation chauvinism."<sup>101</sup>

Lenin had his way in the matter of the Union, but Stalin and Orjonikidze went ahead in pressurising with strongmen methods the Georgians to join the Union as part of a Transcaucasian Federation with Azerbaijan and Armenia. Stalin was concerned about administrative efficiency, but Lenin finally interfered because he wanted efficiency through a real solution of the problem of nationalities not by its bureaucratic suppression.

Moshe Lewin argues convincingly that it was Stalin's role in the Georgian affair which made Lenin change his mind in his "testament" and add a final section in which he proposed to deprive Stalin of his powers as General Secretary.<sup>102</sup> In an earlier entry he had evaluated Stalin's qualities and deficiencies along with those of other leaders without coming to such a conclusion.<sup>103</sup> But meanwhile Lenin had started his own enquiry into what had happened. His notes on the national question dictated in between these entries regarding Stalin reveal that Lenin saw the spirit of Russian bureaucratism and chauvinism reviving. He starts with a self-criticism:

*"I suppose I have been very remiss with respect to the workers of Russia for not having intervened energetically and decisively enough on the notorious question of autonomisation which, it appears, is officially called the question of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics."*<sup>104</sup>

He argues that there is no point "in getting an united apparatus, as long as it is still that same Russian apparatus which... we took over



from tsarism and slightly anointed with Soviet oil". With the existing apparatus — "a bourgeois and tsarist hotch potch" there is no protection whatsoever for the non-Russians against "the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great-Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and a tyrant, such as the typical Russian bureaucrat is." And then Lenin puts the blame on the three leading comrades involved in the Georgian affair. About Stalin he writes:

*"I think that Stalin's haste and his infatuation with pure administration, together with his spite against the notorious 'nationalist-socialism', played a fatal role here. In politics spite generally plays the basest of roles."*<sup>105</sup>

Lenin makes a fundamental point regarding nationalism in this context. One must distinguish between the "nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation."<sup>106</sup> And then he proves in one of the greatest passages he ever wrote that his internationalism was not a shallow abstract sort of cosmopolitanism that hasn't taken seriously the question of national identity. As a revolutionary communist with a spotless record in solidarity irrespective of nationality he could have claimed to be innocent of any national oppression. And yet as a member of the Great-Russian nation he includes himself in the collective of the oppressor-nation. He does not deny his identity as a Great-Russian and thus as a member of an oppressor-nation, though he himself had never been a Great-Russian bully. He recognizes that even as a true and sincere communist he cannot argue only on the basis of "we Communists", how much he may have wished to do so. He includes himself also in that other collective of "we Great-Russians" and he does that not only as a way of talking but he derives political conclusions from that. He dictates on December 31, 1922:

*"In respect of the second kind of nationalism we (!) nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence; furthermore, we (!) commit violence and insult an infinite number of times without noticing it. It is sufficient to recall my Volga reminiscences of how non-Russians are treated...*

*That is why internationalism on the part of oppressors or 'great' nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bullies), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which obtains in actual practice... In one way or*



another, by one's attitude or by concessions, it is necessary to compensate the non-Russians for the lack of trust, for the suspicion and the insults to which the government of the 'dominant' nation subjected them in the past."<sup>107</sup>

Following this Lenin even considers the possibility that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics which he also would like to strengthen for the common struggle against capitalist imperialism for the time being might be retained "only for military and diplomatic affairs" and that in all other respects "full independence should be restored to the individual People's Commissariats".<sup>108</sup> The task of co-ordination would then rest with the party.

The administrative inconvenience implied in this decentralisation should be accepted in view of the larger revolutionary perspective. Unity is necessary, but unity imposed in an "imperialist" way would be self-defeating for the revolution. "When we (!) ourselves lapse, even if only in trifles, into imperialist attitudes towards oppressed nationalities, we would undermine "all our principled sincerity, all our principled defense of the struggle against imperialism." It would undermine the common struggle with the peoples of Asia which are about to rise against imperialism.

*"It would be unpardonable opportunism if, on the eve of the debut of the East, just as it is awakening, we undermined our prestige with its peoples, even if only by the slightest crudity or injustice towards our own non-Russian nationalities".<sup>109</sup>*

Lenin prepared for a major political confrontation with Stalin and others on these questions. But his health deteriorated and by March 1923 his political life had ended without the completion of this task to which he devoted all his last energies.<sup>110</sup>

### c. The Comintern and National and Colonial Questions

The Communist International, in short the Comintern or Third International, was founded in 1919. Its Congresses became the platform for the discussion and formulation of concepts and policies with regard to the national liberation movements in semi-colonial and colonial countries. In some of these countries revolutionary upheavals had already taken place following the first Russian Revolution of 1905, such as the Persian Revolution of 1906, the 'Young Turk' revolution of 1908 and the Chinese revolution of 1912. In other countries national movements were growing as in India under the leadership of the INC. The October revolution and the anti-imperialist declarations of the revolutionary Soviet government, and its annihilation



lation of Tsarist claims had created great enthusiasm all over Asia. The main enemy of the national liberation movements and of national independence in Asia was British imperialism. Britain was at the same time the main force in the armed intervention against Bolshevik Russia in the years 1919-1920. It was quite natural that Turks and Persians, Indians and Afghans, started looking on Moscow freed from Tsarist imperialist ambitions as no longer a threat but an ally against the common enemy.

But how should the communist revolutionaries in Moscow look at these movements and countries under non-communist leadership? How could they promote the proletarian world revolution by linking up with national revolutionary movements under non-proletarian leadership? Lenin had given a basis in the framework of his imperialism-theory by pointing out that the struggle for national independence in colonial and semi-colonial countries was not a struggle against feudalism and autocracy as it had been in Europe and Russia, but a new type of national struggle against bourgeois imperialism.

Till 1920 not much attention was given to the East. Revolutionary hopes were still focussing on the West, on a proletarian revolution in Germany to free the Russian revolution out of its isolation. The First Congress of the Comintern in 1919, promised support to the anti-imperialist struggle of the colonial peoples but said that "the liberation of the colonies is thinkable only in connection with the liberation of the working class in the metropolitan countries".

The relevant section of its manifesto ended with the appeal:

*"Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia! The hour of the proletarian dictatorship in Europe will strike for you as the hour of your deliverance".*<sup>111</sup>

This Eurocentric approach had changed at the time of the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920, where a crucial discussion took place on the "national and colonial question". The expectations of the proletarian revolution spreading and developing into a world-wide upheaval against capitalist imperialism were still or again running high. But this time there was an upsurge in the East. At the Congress there were delegates from India, China, Korea, Netherlands-Indies, Persia and Turkey. And Soviet Russia itself was increasingly involved in problems of national liberation beyond its southern borders in the confrontation with British imperialism.

Expectations and chances to find allies against British imperialism in countries like Afghanistan, Persia and Turkey confronted the communist



leaders in Moscow with a fundamental choice. Should they support everywhere communist parties in order to promote the world revolution or should they accept co-operation with certain bourgeois governments on the basis of national interests, even if that would be at the expense of the local communist parties? What was to be the relationship of the proletarian revolution and the national liberation struggles?

The Second Comintern Congress in July 1920 had the historical task to answer these questions and formulate a policy. Lenin submitted preliminary draft theses on the national and colonial questions.<sup>112</sup> He argues that, in the age of imperialism and at the point of history in which the world bourgeoisie concentrates its attacks on Soviet Russia, not only the workers of all countries but also all the national liberation movements have a fundamental interest in the victory of the Soviet system over world imperialism. Therefore, not only all workers should unite, but also “a policy must be pursued that will achieve the closest *alliance, with Soviet Russia, of all the national and colonial liberation movements*”.<sup>113</sup> That means that in backward countries with predominantly “feudal or patriarchal and patriarchal-peasant relations” the communist parties have to assist the “bourgeois-democratic liberation movement”. They should especially support revolutionary peasant movements. Lenin actually applies here his 1905 strategy of the workers-peasants alliance in the democratic revolution to the alliance of proletarian Soviet Russia and the Comintern with bourgeois-democratic national liberation movements, so that the revolutionary proletariat of the West and the revolutionary peasantry of the East united around Soviet Russia would overthrow capitalist imperialism. In this vision the national liberation struggles of the East, though not socialist in themselves, would become part of the socialist world revolution.

M.N. Roy, the Indian communist, warned in his theses and in his historical debate with Lenin, not to rely on the bourgeois leadership of the national movements.<sup>114</sup> Lenin doubted whether the Indian proletariat and peasantry were ready for independent revolutionary action as Roy suggested. He, however, conceded that there was a real danger of betrayal by the bourgeois leadership of national movements. It was agreed therefore in the final draft to speak of supporting “the *revolutionary* liberation movements” rather than the “bourgeois-democratic liberation movement”.<sup>115</sup> This meant, as Lenin explained, “that we, as communists, should and will support bourgeois-liberation movements in the colonies only when they are genuinely revolutionary, and when their exponents do not hinder our work of educating and organising in a revolutionary spirit the peasantry and the masses of the exploited.”<sup>116</sup>



In his comments on the final draft Lenin also strongly recommended to apply the idea of Soviet organisation in peasant feudal and semi-feudal relations and he reported agreement on the proposition

*“that with the aid of the proletariat of the advanced countries, backward countries can go over to the Soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage”.*<sup>117</sup>

Reading this, one has to bear in mind the historical context of 1920. Lenin and his comrades were not projecting patterns of development for the next sixty years or so. They were still expecting the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist imperialism very soon. They did not expect that the bourgeois leadership of national liberation movements would have time to consolidate themselves on the basis of a capitalist development in their countries once imperialism would have been defeated world-wide and the proletariat would have been victorious in the advanced capitalist countries.

Lenin acknowledged at the Third Congress of the Comintern in June 1921 that the revolution in the capitalist countries had not materialised in spite of revolutionary symptoms which had evoked such expectations. At the same Third Congress in which Lenin drew this disappointing conclusion and demanded efforts towards a “fundamental preparation” for the revolution, M.N. Roy vigorously protested that virtually no attention was given to the “Eastern question”, as he got only five minutes to report on India. “The way in which the Eastern question has been dealt with at this Congress is purely opportunist, and is worthy rather of a Congress of the Second International”.<sup>118</sup> A similar protest came a few years later from Nguyen Ai Quoc, better known as Ho Chi Minh, who accused the European Communist parties of underestimating the significance of the colonies for the world revolution.<sup>119</sup>

The Fourth Congress, held in November 1922, paid more attention to the “Eastern Question”. Differentiations between various situations were made to create scope for flexible policies, but, of course, the basic dilemma remained. Workers and peasants were supposed to support the national struggle even when the leadership was in hands of their class enemies. The “Theses on the Eastern Question” speak of the “twofold task” of communist and working class parties in the East:

*“on the one hand to fight for the most radical solutions of the problems of bourgeois-democratic revolution, directed to the conquest of political independence and on the other to organise the*



*workers and peasants to fight for their special class interests''*.<sup>120</sup>

M.N. Roy, who got elected in the leading organs of the Comintern in this year, strongly emphasised this need to organise workers and peasants independently, and this was endorsed by the Congress. But this did not mean in the view of the Comintern that workers and peasants could launch struggles against their exploiters without further consideration. The policy of "united anti-imperialist front" could imply that they had to wait till after a common victory in the national struggle. That was the difficult dilemma of the grand alliance between communism and nationalism which would produce again and again awkward choices in the years to come.

As it happened *China*, and not India as earlier expected, became the main testing ground for the Comintern policies in the East. As Carr writes: "Nowhere were the opportunities of an alliance between communism and nationalism more promising; and nowhere were they so fully exploited in the sequel".<sup>121</sup> Already in 1921 contacts had been established between representatives of the Comintern and Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the nationalist Kuomintang government in Canton in Southern China. Almost simultaneously a small Chinese communist party (CCP) had come into being in industrial Shanghai. Sun Yat-sen offered the Chinese communists the possibility of individual membership in the Kuomintang. This was accepted by the CCP and the Comintern.

Moscow declared to agree with Sun Yat-sen that conditions in China were not ripe for the establishment of either Communism or Sovietism, and that the paramount problem for China was to achieve national unification and independence for which Russia promised its support.<sup>122</sup> Chiang Kai-Shek went to Moscow to organise the supply of arms and to study questions of military organisation. And Borodin, a representative of the Russian C.P., came to Canton to become a political adviser to Sun Yat-sen. A direct link between the CP of Russia and the Kuomintang was established and intensive co-operation followed. The CCP publicly pronounced that the Kuomintang "should be the central force of the national revolution and should assume the leadership of it" and its members worked within the KMT in growing numbers.<sup>123</sup>

Bolshevik influence grew, both ideologically and politically, during the years 1924 and 1925. Simultaneously the Chinese labour movement was growing and proving its militancy. Peasant unrest was spreading also. Both alarmed the possessing classes and their representatives in the KMT. For the time being, however, it did not affect the KMT policies.



The Executive of the Comintern adopted in Feb. 1925 a resolution on "the Chinese Question", presented by M.N. Roy, which admitted the existence of a Right wing in the KMT but welcomed its defeat at the recent 2nd KMT Congress. The resolution stated with confidence:

*"The party of Kuomintang, the fundamental core of which acts in alliance with the Chinese communists, represents a revolutionary bloc of workers, peasants, intelligentsia and urban democracy on the basis of a community of class interests of these strata in the struggle against foreign imperialists and the whole military feudal order for the independence of the country and for a single revolutionary-democratic government".*<sup>124</sup>

However, as is well known, Chiang Kai-shek moved against the communists and outmanoeuvred them completely in the course of 1926-27. The great experiment had failed. The communists had supported a nationalist movement and found themselves out in the cold. The question is why and whether this always has to be. The post-mortem discussions in Moscow located the causes of failure in political errors of the leadership rather than in the basic constellation.

But it was the objective conditions which made it impossible to reconcile the two aims of the Comintern: the strengthening of the nationalist movement and its radicalisation. These two aims can be reconciled only, as Haithcox points out, when the national movement is based on the masses. "Neither the Kuomintang nor the left Kuomintang was a mass nationalist party. The membership of both was largely confined to the intellectual and urban middle classes. Both were dependent on the good will of militarists opposed to agrarian reform".<sup>125</sup> In order to strengthen the national movement of the Kuomintang the communists had to restrain the workers and peasants. The moment the nationalist bourgeoisie represented by Chiang Kai-shek gave up the orientation towards Moscow and turned to the West the communists faced repression by the apparatus which they had helped to strengthen and had to start all over again.

As is well known, the new and indeed innovative start was led by Mao Tse-tung who developed in long and difficult years the mass peasant base in the countryside, which established the communist party as the party of the agrarian revolution. Simultaneously it emerged as the most uncompromising and effective champion of national independence in the struggle against Japanese imperialism. Thus it was able to break the hegemony of the Kuomintang and to lead both the national and the social revolution.<sup>126</sup> However, it took time before this approach was accepted in the party.



In the aftermath of the defeat of 1927 the Comintern reviewed and revised its policies on its Sixth Congress held in August 1928. Its "Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-colonies" start with confirming the validity of Lenin's "Theses on the National and Colonial Questions", but practically they move a long distance in the direction of dismissing the national bourgeoisie as possible ally. Even those who reflect the interests of native industry and who support the national movement "represent a special vacillating compromising tendency which may be designated as *national reformism*".<sup>127</sup> The CCP is criticised for tailing behind such bourgeoisie in 1925-27.<sup>128</sup> The party of the proletariat has to project its own independent line, in order to establish its hegemony already in the bourgeois-democratic revolution. In this connection great emphasis is laid on the agrarian revolution. However, for the time being, the other danger is also mentioned, namely that of sectarian isolation from the toiling masses which would result from underestimating the role of the bourgeois national reformists.

Special attention is given to *India*. The "betrayal of the cause of the national revolution by the Indian bourgeoisie" after the 1919-1922 movement has to be exposed.<sup>129</sup> It is stated that the bourgeoisie of India like that of China is "so closely bound up with landlordism, with usury capital and with the exploitation of the peasant masses in general" that it opposes not only agrarian revolution but also any decisive agrarian reform.<sup>130</sup>

The possibility of temporary agreements with the national bourgeoisie is not yet completely excluded, but the trend is towards confrontation rather than co-operation. The INC should not get a chance to repeat the coups of the KMT. The difference, however, was that the INC did not command an army and therefore depended much more on mass mobilisation. M.N. Roy, therefore, who had criticised the uncritical collaboration with the KMT at the cost of mass mobilisation, advocated the continuation of an united front policy in India.<sup>131</sup>

The lessons from the defeat in China were applied in India, leading to another defeat. It was the time that the Indian National Congress turned towards a more radical approach, with the preparations for the civil disobedience in 1929, and with the growing influence of Nehru. The communists had expanded their influence through the trade union movement and the Workers and Peasants Parties (WPP). Just at this juncture they decided, following the new Comintern line which had become even more extreme left after the Tenth Plenum in 1929, to



disband the WPP and to cut all relations with the INC. A "Draft Platform of Action of the C.P. of India" denounced not only Gandhi but also depicted the "left national reformists" Nehru and Bose as "the most harmful and dangerous obstacles to victory of the Indian revolution".<sup>132</sup>

The developments in China and India in the twenties document how difficult it proved to be to relate to the nationalist movements led by the bourgeoisie. The danger of being swallowed up was demonstrated in China, the danger of getting isolated from the mainstream of the national movement became real in India in the period of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. The Seventh Congress meeting in 1935 tried to repair the damage and returned to an United Front approach. Its resolution on "The Anti-Imperialist Peoples' Front in the Colonial Areas" instructed communists to participate in the "mass anti-imperialist movements headed by the nationalists-reformists" and to seek joint action with them.<sup>133</sup>

In India communists applied this line by entering into the Congress Socialist Party, trying to broaden their base through this form of involvement in the national movement.

When the wave of anti-colonial struggles and upheavals swept over Asia and Africa after the Second World War the Comintern no longer existed. It had been dissolved by Stalin. The colonial empires were dismantled. "Development" became the watchword for the societies emerging from colonial rule. Obviously quite different paths of development were taken or rather imposed. For some countries political independence did not open a way to any substantial change. The Philippines, for example, were forced to follow the path of neo-colonial "development". On the other side, China and Vietnam were able to cut off the ties of capitalist imperialist control and enter the path of development towards socialism, thanks to the fact that their liberation struggles were led by communists.

India represented still another form of development. Compared to neo-colonial countries like the Philippines it showed a certain measure of independence. But it was led by the bourgeoisie. Thus the old problem returned in a new form: how should the revolutionary left relate to this bourgeois regime. This problem was connected with the fundamental question regarding the nature of post-colonial society, which has been touched upon in the previous section. Meanwhile, the national question also presented itself after Independence in the aspirations of ethnic and linguistic groups.



d. *The national question in post-colonial society*

The achievement of national independence from colonial rule did not automatically settle the national question in all respects. The anti-imperialist struggle had united oppressed peoples across ethnic, linguistic and other barriers. But artificial borders inherited from colonialism and uneven development imposed by belated capitalism became the basis for the articulation of new national aspirations. Separatist struggles took place and are taking place all over the world in spite of the fact that they were almost always unsuccessful, Bangla Desh being the exception. India has been confronted with armed uprisings in the North-East and is facing a rising wave of demands for separate states based on ethnic, social and religious identities.

How does the Left relate to this? What guidelines does marxist theory provide? Naturally there has been a tendency to apply the criteria developed by Marx and Lenin in the present situation as well. But there is a growing awareness that the new conditions in the epoch of post-colonial imperialism demand a rethinking regarding the national question in some respects. Basic differences have to be taken into account.

Firstly, in the time of Marx capitalism promoted the *unification* of various ethnic groups in larger nation-states, as mentioned already. Capitalist imperialism of today with its global companies and international institutions is not interested in strong nation-states. On the contrary, such states can more successfully resist its penetration and exploitation. The breaking-up into smaller units may make it more easy to dominate their economies.

Secondly, Lenin developed his approach in view of Tsarist Russia, that gigantic prison of oppressed nations. India has also a large number of nationalities, ethnic groups, languages, etc., but the overall set-up is fundamentally different, as Ajit Roy has argued over the years.<sup>134</sup> There is a multinational Indian state with unevenness in development but without a dominant oppressor nation. The role of the Great-Russian colonizers has been played by the British imperialists and the Indian bourgeoisie which has inherited the Indian state does not belong to one particular nationality. A significant share of modern Indian capital is controlled by Marwaris from Rajasthan and Parsees. The Hindi language has a pre-dominant status, but in the bureaucracy there is over-representation from non-Hindi speaking states.

The explanation for this phenomenon lies in the *multinational*



*character of Indian monopoly capital.* Javed Alam has shown how the Indian bourgeoisie became a “supra-national class” as he calls it.<sup>135</sup> Coming from a commercial background Indian entrepreneurs were mobile and moved between different regions. In the process they became a “pan-Indian bourgeoisie” operating in a pan-Indian market. Given the relative economic backwardness of the largest linguistic group—the Hindi belt—no dominant nation emerged. The only oppression was colonial oppression coming from outside. Indian nationalism therefore could unite India as a multinational society. The post-independent struggle for linguistic states was not directed against a particular oppressor nation. It was based on the democratic demand for the use of the vernacular languages and on the aspirations of locally dominant sections of the ruling classes.<sup>136</sup>

There is one important exception. The *tribal movements* both in the bordering regions as in the interior of the country are expressing the aspirations of an oppressed nationality. They are indeed exploited, oppressed and subjected to discrimination. But the oppressor is not one particular nationality. Then who is the oppressor? Some see the hand of imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism dividing society by a politics of privileges, favouring and thus domesticating certain sections, including industrial workers, and leaving out the underdogs who are now demanding their share. The Communist Parties in India which argue in favour of national unity are accused of defending such discriminatory policies for the sake of the new labour aristocracy on which they are based.<sup>137</sup> The weakness of this approach seems to be that it is ready to support any struggle of the most deprived sections irrespective of the question how their demands fit into a realistic revolutionary perspective for the whole of Indian society. The assumption seems to be that any struggle which weakens the present set-up results automatically in advances towards revolution. But it is one of the tasks of revolutionary theory and organisations to mediate the various demands and expectations in a coherent program and strategy.

The much blamed Communist Parties, CPI and CPI(M), have pursued this task over the years in a more sensitive and solid way. The imperialists had emphasized the diversity of India, the bourgeois nationalists its homogeneity. After the Partition the INC tended to strengthen the unitary structure of the Indian State at the cost of a federal set-up in accordance with the interests of pan-Indian monopoly capital. The communists supported national integration and national unity but on the basis of equal rights for all nationalities and greater powers for the states. Learning from the Russian experience they did



not share Marx' preference for the unified, centralised state, which Ajit Roy uses to quote in his polemics against federalism.<sup>138</sup> On the other hand they agreed that in the absence of an oppressor-nation the right of secession did not deserve to be maintained in India as it was the case in Russia. But they saw the need to support the struggles for the free and equal articulation of national identities within the over-all Indian framework. They actively supported or even led struggles for linguistic states.<sup>139</sup> With regard to the tribal struggles they advocate autonomous states or autonomous regions depending on the conditions.

A. Roy fears that more autonomy for the states would strengthen more backward forces and reactionary regionalism, and weaken the multinational unity of the toiling people in the fight against the multinational power of monopoly capital.<sup>140</sup> Of course, local ruling class forces are eager to exploit a more federal set-up. All the more leftist forces have to recognize the genuine aspirations of people to express their socio-cultural identity so as to prevent that these aspirations are exploited by reactionary forces. People don't identify themselves only as "Indians" or as "workers" or "peasants". They experience themselves also as Tamils, Bengalis or Santhals. Affirming this and providing political structures for this articulation may be exploited by local bourgeois forces, but it may also help to curb the danger of indeed reactionary forms of social identification on the basis of caste and religion. All have to join hands in democratic organisations on an All-India level to fight monopoly capital on the one hand and communalism on the other. That is certainly true. But the problem is that awakening tribal communities and other deprived sections will need due recognition and concrete affirmation of their identity before they can join that basic struggle on a real common and equal basis.

### **3. Problems of Social Revolution**

#### *a. Types of Social Revolution in the Post-colonial Epoch*

Since several decades the so-called "Third World" has been the scene of anti-colonial liberation struggles, anti-imperialist wars, military coups, popular uprisings and revolutions. In a number of cases this has led to the establishment of marxist-oriented regimes which aim at a socialist transformation of society. It is important to distinguish the various ways in which these revolutionary regimes originated and develop. Vietnam, Cuba, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Nicaragua are all ruled by marxist-oriented forces. But they have travelled different roads, have made different historical experiences from which rich lessons can be drawn by those who want to travel in



the direction of socialism and yet have to find their own road.

Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux make a helpful distinction between "colonial" and "post-colonial" revolutions.<sup>141</sup> Marxist revolutionaries have come to power in the course of successful *anti-colonial* struggles for national independence under their leadership. This was the case in Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Zimbabwe. The social revolution was envisaged and embarked upon in the context of a struggle against foreign domination. "Post-colonial" revolutions took place in societies which were no longer under direct colonial rule.

*"In these, the primary target of the upheavals was not foreign domination but the political and social system of an indigenous ruling class and its allies. Although often supported from outside, this class alliance was internally rooted, and its overthrow, therefore, involved a correspondingly greater and deeper transformation of the society in question".*<sup>142</sup>

The authors quote the instances of Mexico (1910-20), Cuba (1956-9), China (1911-1949), Iran, Afghanistan, Nicaragua and Ethiopia in the 1970s, though it must be said that semi-colonial China in view of the unifying character of the struggle against Japanese domination fits in the first category as well.

The *Cuban Revolution* brought about the overthrow of the dictatorial regime of Batista on the basis of a progressive democratic programme. Initially the Communist Party opposed the guerilla struggle under the leadership of Fidel Castro as "putchist". Only at a late stage it started giving support, while the urban industrial working class played a crucial role in the final stage by means of a general strike. But it was not the Marxist-Leninist party which led the Cuban Revolution. As a party it merged with the 26 July Movement under Castro's leadership in the "Party of Socialist Revolution" two years after the revolution. The USSR and other Latin American parties continued to oppose the strategy of armed revolution which was propagated by Cuba after its own success.<sup>143</sup>

Regis Debray in close connection with Che Guevara tried to construct a new theoretical model for revolution in Latin America based on the Cuban experience. His book "Revolution in the Revolution?" became a sort of manual for guerilla movements in the sixties and found official Cuban recognition.<sup>144</sup> Rejecting the approach of establishing democratic Popular Front Governments, he declared guerilla warfare with the aim of overthrowing the capitalist state to be



the main task. Differing from the Chinese and Vietnamese people-based protracted war he propagated his *foco theory*, according to which everything should be subordinated to the needs of the centres (focos) of guerilla operations. Distrusting the cities and city-based political leadership he saw the guerilla force as "the party in embryo". This approach relied upon military techniques, ignored mass organisations, lacked a concrete class-analysis and underestimated the relative strength of bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and proletariat. It expected all regimes to collapse in the same way as the rotten Batista regime and forgot that the Cuban revolutionaries had broad-based support also in the cities.

Disappointment set in after the death of the great revolutionary Che Guevara in Bolivia and the failure of other guerilla focos. The Cuban model could not be repeated, it seemed. New expectations arose with the election victory of the Popular Unity Front led by the marxist Allende in Chile in 1970. Maybe there was yet a peaceful road to socialism. Allende's Front Government had the mass support which Che Guevara lacked. But he had no control of the guns. He controlled the government but by far not all of the State power. As Marx once said elections give the right, not the power to rule. While the Allende government tried to introduce reforms within the given legal framework of the bourgeois state, national and international capital could prepare a bloody come-back through the mobilisation of middle class-sections, international economic pressures and finally the USA-backed coup of the Chilean army in 1973, followed by large-scale massacres.<sup>145</sup>

*The Nicaraguan Revolution* which united various revolutionary traditions in an original way brought a new, significant breakthrough. Its experiences are worth to be studied. Firstly, there was the FSLN, the Sandinist Front for National Liberation. It united the guerilla tradition of the popular hero Sandino with Marxism. Sandino had challenged the Nicaraguan oligarchy and the USA between 1928 and 1934, the year of his assassination by the US-installed National Guard of Somoza I. His political program had been a mixture of national demands and increasingly radical social reforms.<sup>146</sup> In those days of the sectarian line of the Comintern the Central American Communists limited their revolutionary role to denouncing Sandino's petty-bourgeois orientation and thus lost the chance to give his struggle a clear revolutionary orientation.

In the late fifties the situation was different. There were personal links between FSLN leaders and the Communist Party of Nicaragua



(PSN) and the victory of Castro in close-by Cuba in 1959 cemented the synthesis of Sandinism and Marxism. The FSLN practised Debray's 'foco' strategy from 1962 to 1967. Learning from serious setbacks it started giving more attention to political work, inspired by the Vietnamese strategy of "protracted people's war" and abandoned for some years all military activity. After taking up the guns again in 1974 it expelled a "Proletarian Tendency" in 1975 which rejected all military adventurism and favoured work among the proletariat. A "third force" developed within the Front, the *Tercerista*, which advocated urban guerilla instead of rural guerilla and alliances with other classes in order to make a political breakthrough.

Meanwhile a bourgeois opposition developed to the Somoza-regime, supported by the powerful Catholic Church. Nicaragua has a relatively strong local agri-industrial bourgeoisie. Its economy was much less dominated by US capital than that of other Latin American countries. This Nicaraguan bourgeoisie did not anticipate major dangers from the side of the weak urban working class, the unorganised rural proletariat and the severely repressed FSLN guerillas.<sup>147</sup> But as Somoza answered all opposition only with ruthless suppression, there was a rapid process of radicalization and of mass-mobilization on all fronts. As Somoza refused to make political concessions and relied on his brutal National Guard, the leadership of the opposition shifted from the liberal bourgeoisie to the FSLN which had the only answer to the National Guard: armed insurrection.

In the situation of deepening revolutionary crisis the split into three factions practically functioned as a division of labour. One section organised the masses in the countryside, one organised the industrial workers and the *Terceristas* undertook spectacular military actions and developed a policy of alliances which was able to divide the ruling class and to win over broad sectors of the petty-bourgeoisie. Recognising their separate limitations and mutual complementary functions, the three tendencies united in March 1979 and established a collective leadership in which all are equally represented. The pro-Moscow PSN kept aloof from the FSLN, pursuing a policy of national unity under bourgeois leadership. But Cuba gave strong support.<sup>148</sup>

It was this combination of rural guerilla and mass organisation, urban guerilla and proletarian mass-work, armed strength and shrewd and innovative political interventions and initiatives, not feeling shy of common platforms and coalitions with bourgeois forces, which made that the leadership of the final mass revolutionary upsurge came in the hands of the FSLN. One more crucial factor has to be mentioned. The



National Guard, the main repressive instrument of Somoza's State apparatus, collapsed completely in the moment of victory of the revolutionary forces in July 1979. Thanks to this the FSLN was not burdened with the inheritance of an old State apparatus. It had to replace it by their own organisations. This was a golden opportunity for the Left and an unexpected heavy political blow to the bourgeoisie which still holds considerable economic power but has no control over political power any more. It can still organise its opposition around the archbishop of the capital, the conservative press, etc. But in the struggle for power the counter-revolution cannot stage a coup as in Chile. It has to fight its way back with the help of US equipped National Guardists across the borders and it will find the Sandinists in its way.

The secret of the Sandinists has been that they were no sectarians. They were able to correct their mistakes, to learn from others, and to unite. Most of the leaders are reported to be quite orthodox Marxists-Leninists in their outlook. But they have been wise enough to root themselves in the living Nicaraguan tradition of Sandinism, thus depriving the class-enemy of the weapon of patriotism. One would hope with Henri Weber that they will also be innovative enough to avoid the pitfalls of bureaucratism by practising a genuine democratic approach in spite of the war-conditions imposed by US-imperialism.<sup>149</sup>

The *Ethiopian Revolution* of 1974 differs very much from the classical schemes of social revolution.<sup>150</sup> It overthrew the absolutist imperial regime of Haile Selassie, and is in that respect comparable to the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of February 1917 rather than to anti-imperialist or post-colonial revolutions in the Third World. It introduced, however, in a very short time very radical reforms, proclaiming some "Ethiopian socialism" as its aim and confessing "Marxism-Leninism" as its ideology. All this was done, not by a Marxist-Leninist Party, which did not at all exist in Ethiopia, but by army officers who before they overthrew the monarchy had hardly been in contact with leftist ideas. Their "revolution from above" was extremely violent in spite of the fact that there was no substantial counter-revolutionary resistance from the side of the old regime or through imperialist interventions.

It was not a simple military coup with progressive aims but isolated from civilian opposition as in Egypt 1952 (Nasser), Iraq 1958 or Somali 1969. Nor was it a coup in which the military take power instructed by a political party as in Afghanistan 1978. This coup took place in the context of a revolutionary crisis, following up and consolidating the achievements of mass upheavals which had been



shaking the old society.<sup>151</sup> However, this did not lead to an easy alliance of military and civilian progressive forces, but rather to severe rivalry. The radical military moved to suppress by bloody methods challenges to their power from civilian rivals on the left, both student-based leftist terrorist movements and trade-unions. Differences within the Derg, the leading body, were also settled by guns. Those who opposed the emerging strong man Mengistu were liquidated. After 1978 this terrorist practice subsided. The reforms aimed at creating a mass-base among peasants and urban sections which had not initiated the revolution. The revolutionary leadership established mass organisations but delayed the formation of a revolutionary party. The most disturbing policy has been the ruthless war against the Eritrean Liberation movements in the name of the integrity of the Ethiopian State. All attempts to bring about a peaceful solution for this national question in which the progressive Eritrean movement has serious claims have failed.

What are the prospects of such a revolution from above, led by a revolutionary military junta instead of a party? The USSR kept a cautious distance to this military-led revolution during the first three years. Only since the consolidation of the leadership of Mengistu in 1977 and the turn of events in the military confrontation with its old client Somali that turned to the West the USSR has given strong political and military support to Ethiopia, enabling it to beat off the Somali aggression in Ogaden and to counter the Eritrean upsurge.

In the 1950s Soviet theory might have classified the Ethiopian case in terms of the "non-capitalist path of development". Since the mid 1970s a new theoretical approach developed in the USSR which speaks of "states of Socialist orientation".<sup>152</sup> Experiences with countries which in the course of time turned from the supposed "non-capitalist path" to pro-capitalist policies, as for example Egypt, opened the eyes for the possibility that progressive state policies may contribute to the formation of new possessing capitalist oriented classes of small farmers, traders, civil servants, etc. The question is how such countries indeed make the transition to socialism. It is remarkable that "these theories play down any mention of class struggle".<sup>153</sup> Mongolia and Cuba are cited as examples that some countries have been able to make the transition. The authors of the study on the Ethiopian Revolution used here don't exclude the possibility that Ethiopia may yet turn into another direction. Deep changes of the old order have been effected, but old and new forces opposed to socialism do exist and the revolutionary leaders themselves, or sections of them, may under changing conditions



advocate a change of course. And what are the democratic organisations and mechanisms to prevent them from doing so?

The 1978 revolution in *Afghanistan* evolved again in a different way. Like Ethiopia (except for a few years) Afghanistan had not been a colony and it had still surviving pre-capitalist, even pre-feudal structures in tribal areas. Unlike Ethiopia there was a communist movement since the 1940s and a party, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) since 1965. Unlike in Ethiopia there was not a social revolution under way when a military coup ousted the pro-Western Government of Daoud Khan. Leftist cells in the army acted on the instruction of the PDPA which had decided to prevent an expected bloody purge of leftists, and to take power rather than to be massacred.

Like the Ethiopians the Afghan communists went ahead with land reforms, abolition of usury, some social reforms in order to consolidate their base and to promote a "national-democratic revolution". However, the land reforms failed in spite of the best intentions. Leftist observers find one of the main reasons for this in the lack of analysis and understanding of the rural conditions among the exclusively urban-based revolutionaries. The Pakistani marxist Feroz Ahmed blames the character of political education of the urban party cadres for it. They were well-versed in Marxist-Leninist classics but had not done any home-work in analysing the concrete conditions in Afghanistan.<sup>154</sup>

They meant to implement an antifeudal-bourgeois revolution, but the "feudal" landlords of the Afghan tribals were not only exploiters as in the books, but also respected representatives of village communities which still had preserved some pre-feudal characteristics reminding of a tributary mode of production.<sup>155</sup> In any case, already in 1979 the rural population started uniting around its exploiters and religious leaders against the would-be reformers from Kabul.

Another reason for the rapid destabilisation of the revolutionary regime was the bloody feuding between the two factions, Khalq led by Taraki and Parcham led by Babrak Karmal. Feroz Ahmed is probably correct in seeing here ancient tribal traditions of vendetta at work. The fact that the revolutionary leaders in Ethiopia also tended to settle their disputes with guns shows that in general the absence of democratic procedures for decision-making and selection of leaders which characterises the army set-up fosters this type of murderous blood-letting. In the process the party got decimated, especially under the rule of Amin which ended with the Soviet intervention. This intervention propped up the revolutionary regime, but at a very heavy price, both in terms of international politics and with regard to the



prospects to win the support of the population. The massive military presence of foreign troops has given even the most reactionary leaders the chance to project their cause in patriotic colours.

### *b. Indian Path to Revolution*

Obviously India cannot be compared to the countries discussed just now. Traditionally the Indian Left has been looking to the experiences of Russia and China in their efforts to chalk out its path to revolution. This is certainly necessary and fruitful, provided no mechanical applications are made. The Indian situation also differs deeply from that of pre-revolutionary Russia and China and serious efforts of the Indian Left are needed to work out an approach that fits the Indian situation. The Marxist Review has been trying to drive that point home again and again.<sup>156</sup> Some of its observations, supplemented with points arising from the preceding discussion of post-colonial revolutions may be briefly presented.

- (1) India has achieved a much higher level of socio-economic development than Tsarist Russia and Kuomintang China in those days. There is much greater balance in development between the major regions of the country, there are much better systems of transport and communication, there is a more organic relationship between the rural hinterland and a number of metropolitan areas. India's political fate cannot be shaped either in one or two dominant cities, as it was the case in Russia, or in rural liberated zones out of reach of the cities, as it was in China.
- (2) In Russia the revolutionary struggle of workers and peasants could link up with the struggle of oppressed peoples for liberation from the yoke of Tsarist, Great-Russian domination. In China there was no great nationality problem, while in the war against Japan class struggle and the struggle for national liberation got merged. In India there is a complicated situation of many nationalities which poses the task to overcome ethnic and linguistic divisions without giving much scope for mobilising national or patriotic feelings for the revolutionary cause.
- (3) India has since 35 years a bourgeois *parliamentary system*. Proletarian revolutions not only in Russia and China but almost everywhere else have been successful only against regimes without a bourgeois-democratic set-up. Of the East-European countries only Czechoslovakia and East-Germany have had a brief experience of liberal parliamentary democracy between the two World Wars. Vietnam, Korea, Cuba, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Nicaragua



all didn't have such a set-up. Chile had, but there—and that is significant—the bourgeoisie was able to stage a come-back by mobilising sections of the middle class and by using the army.

The fact that the bourgeois parliamentary system has survived for so long in India—as compared to almost all other post-colonial societies—is a measure of the strength of the Indian bourgeoisie as a hegemonic class. Its power to rule by consensus of the people is on the decline. It has to rely increasingly on authoritarian means. Militarisation of society is growing. Yet there is still a democratic set-up which leaves room to opposition. The state apparatus is not completely alienated as it was in Russia or China, or Ethiopia or Nicaragua. It is not only the instrument of repression but also, however little, the means for the implementation of some populist measures meant to maintain the support of the masses for the present set-up. Some limited successes can still be achieved through popular pressure.

Any revolutionary strategy in India has to reckon with this reality. The simplistic boycott of elections, etc., is as unrealistic as the assumption that the Left through concentration on elections only could come to power. The Marxist Review pleads in this connection for a “principled and skilful use of the parliamentary institutions by the revolutionary vanguard as a *subsidiary* part of its wider mass struggles” with the aim of destroying the moral and constitutional legitimacy of the ruling classes by exposing their undemocratic machinations and winning legitimacy in the eyes of the people.<sup>157</sup>

With regard to the *army* it has to be remembered that with the exception of Cuba and Nicaragua in all proletarian revolutions the defection of a part of the armed forces to the side of the revolutionary masses has always played a key role. On the other hand, the examples of Ethiopia and Afghanistan show that when the revolutionary initiative or leadership gets into the hands of the army tremendous post-revolutionary problems are bound to come.

(4) It may be consoling that revolutions don't always wait for revolutionary vanguards to be ready before they happen. Sometimes the organised parties were taken by surprise, as in Russia in 1905 and Feb. 1917. Sometimes they were absent from the evolving struggle as in Cuba and Nicaragua, sometimes they were even non-existent as in Ethiopia. On the other hand there is the crucial role of its leadership in October 1917 in Russia, throughout the liberation struggle in China, in Yugoslavia, Vietnam, etc.

In India we have a long tradition of democratic and socialist



movements, of trade-unions and communist parties. However, while the socio-economic development is relatively well-balanced throughout the country, the political-ideological development of leftist forces is extremely uneven. There are strongholds in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura on the one hand, and large areas elsewhere which are completely dominated by rightist forces.

Equally serious is the problem of the *division of the Left*. Differences of analysis, strategy and tactics are bound to crop up in a country as complicated as India. The problem of such differences becomes damaging if the differences are codified and ossified in a sectarian-dogmatic way, not allowing a free and open, critical and self-critical analysis and discussion of the issues concerned. In spite of the relative freedom of public discussion and access to literature, etc., marxist theoretical work seems to lack depth at least inside the parties, and such a deficiency leads easily to practical defeats.

Reflecting on these specific features of the Indian situation, The Marxist Review has developed a critical evaluation of the three positions of the divided Left regarding the path to revolution in India. It disagrees with the M.L. approach because of the basic differences between India now and China at the time of the revolution which don't allow a repetition along similar lines. It also has consistently criticised the CPI approach which expects a more or less peaceful transition through the formation of a government of National Democracy based on an alliance of anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly and anti-feudal forces. As far as the general perspective is concerned, it comes closer to the CPI(M) approach which aims at a People's Democracy based on a similar alliance, but with the crucial difference that the CPI(M) insists on working class leadership over the alliance with non-proletarian strata. But it severely criticises that party for having never made serious efforts to elaborate this approach in concrete terms based on careful analysis of changing conditions. This is brought out by the fact that the party in 1977 still referred to the "Statement of Policy" adopted in 1951, thus ignoring for example the rise of the kulak class and 25 years of parliamentary regime.

The Marxist Review emphasizes the need for a thorough, ongoing analysis. Based on it a comprehensive, dialectical approach has to be worked out instead of a one-sided sectarian line. It has to include cities and villages, work among industrial workers and agricultural labourers, pursue alliances with non-proletarian strata, especially middle peasants, and class-mobilisation outside parliament and articulation of these struggles inside parliament. The validity of this approach is



confirmed by the experience of the Nicaraguan revolution and the supplementary role of various sections of the divided Left as mentioned above.

Some young activists tend to dismiss the established parties altogether in disappointment about their performance. That can be done only out of a combination of arrogance and ignorance after more than 50 years of dedicated work by thousands and thousands of sincere and committed cadres and after significant achievements of the communist Left which even a sharp critic as Bipan Chandra acknowledges.<sup>158</sup> Actually these over-zealous critics who are unable to find anything good in the main parties share to a large extent their deficiencies in the approach to marxist theory.

The deficiencies of Indian marxism which cannot be denied are closely connected with the fact that it is steeped in traditions and patterns created and imposed by Stalin. Major sections of the Indian Left even today, still seem to think that one who criticizes Stalin must be a Trotskyite as it was in the 1930's, or at least they use this as a convenient means to dismiss questions in this direction. Fortunately some prominent marxists who are above any suspicion of being CIA agents have come forward to challenge the Stalinist tradition which is well alive till today.

Looking back on forty years or so, K. Damodaran critically evaluates the *impact of Stalinism*. He notes that as a consequence of Stalinism no serious education in Marxism took place. Stalin's "Short History" was the main textbook, otherwise party programmes and resolutions were studied, and that was taken for "theory". As a result one wrong analysis after the other led the party from one mistake to the other. One example given is the analysis of the Nehru government as com-pradore. Emerging doubts were countered not through fresh studies but by quoting scriptures.

Damodaran sees one of the basic problems in Stalinism as it shaped Indian Marxism in the *substitution of party for class*. Because only party, especially party leadership mattered marxist education of the class was not taken seriously. Because the party was supposed to be the sole representative of the class all efforts were concentrated on securing parliamentary victories and electoral alliances with other parties. Class organisations as the AITUC were split after the party had split into CPI and CPI(M), for the sake of electoral purposes. The approach was not to "conceive of struggle basically as one between classes and not parties". In that way even illusions could come up that the working class had captured power in Kerala with the electoral



victory of the party and the formation of a leftist government. The necessity of creating organs of mass power independent of the bourgeois state were completely ignored. The whole split between CPI and CPI(M) was according to Damodaran about nothing more than the question how to win more seats.

In order to break with Stalinism one has to break with idolatry, Damodaran asserts.

*"I am not a Trotskyist. Stalin was my idol. That idol is broken to pieces. I don't want to replace a broken idol with a new idol even if it is not a broken one, because I don't now believe in idolatry. I think Trotsky, Bukharin, Rosa Luxemburg, Gramsci, Lukacz and other marxists should be seriously studied and critically evaluated by all communists."*

This will be needed to raise the theoretical level and to come to an unification of the Indian left on a principled basis.

*"Unification cannot be brought about by breaking each others heads but only by principled discussions and comradely debates and through united actions for a commonly agreed programme. This will succeed only if the ranks of the different communist parties raise their own theoretical level and enable themselves to intervene in this great debate effectively."*<sup>159</sup>

These reflections of an old communist are extremely relevant for the younger generations of leftist activists inside and outside the parties. They have joined the struggle in the post-Stalin era, but their outlook and attitude are very often still shaped in the Stalinist mould.

When people of various tendencies come together and discuss a particular issue, let us say the farmer's agitation, the first concern of many tends to be to label the participants on a "confessional" basis: "do you believe that India is semi-feudal", etc. Facts are selected and assembled to prove the correctness of this or that line. Seldom the theoretical, scientific effort is made to analyse those aspects which don't fit so easily in the pre-determined doctrinal frame, and to use other views to review, re-confirm or correct one's own assumptions. Rank and file workers should not be exposed to doubts and questions which might "confuse" them. The ideological guardians take care that their innocent followers don't get in touch with heretical thoughts. All this is harmful to the emancipation of the working class and other exploited masses, to the unity of the left, and to the prospects of an emancipatory revolution. Fortunately there are signs that these attitudes are increasingly going to be challenged.



## NOTES

1. Some theoretical essays in *Economic and Political Weekly* give an idea of the scope of the discussions.
2. For the most recent survey of the whole debate see Alice Thorner, "Semi-Feudalism or Capitalism? Contemporary Debate on classes and Modes of Production in India", in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Dec. 4, 11, 18, 1982.
3. See Marx/Engels, *On Colonialism*, Moscow, 88.
4. *ibid.*, 38.
5. *ibid.*, 84.
6. *Sel. Works* 1, 111 f.
7. *On Colonialism*, 88.
8. *ibid.*, 89.
9. Bipan Chandra, "Karl Marx. His theories of Asian Societies and Colonial Rule", Centre for Historical Studies, JNU, New Delhi, 119.
10. *Sel. Works*, 112.
11. *Capital* I, 424 f.
12. Cf. Bipan Chandra, *op. cit.*, 44 ff.
13. *ibid.*, 54.
14. Quoted by Chandra, *ibid.*, 55.
15. *On Colonialism*, 35.
16. *ibid.*, 37 f.
17. *ibid.*, 39.
18. Bipan Chandra gives a survey of various positions, *op. cit.*, 62 ff; cf. Wielenga, *Marxist Views on India*, *op. cit.*, and the literature mentioned there; cf. also Guna, *The question of Asiatic Mode*, FORT, Bangalore.
19. Chandra, *op. cit.*, 76 f.
20. *ibid.*, 84 f.
21. *ibid.*, 111.
22. Letter to Danielson, 18.6.1892, *Sel. Corr.*, 421.
23. See D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, 2nd rev. ed., Bombay 1975; and Kathleen Gough, "Modes of Production in Southern India" in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, feb. 1980.
24. Kosambi, *op. cit.*, 295 f.
25. *ibid.*, 353 f; cf. 379 f.
26. *ibid.*, 355.
27. *ibid.*, 403.
28. *ibid.*, 395.
29. Alavi, "Structure of Colonial Formations", *EPW Annual Number*, March 1981.
30. Alavi, *ibid.*, 481; cf. also Alavi, "India and the Colonial Mode of Production," *EPW Special Number*, August 1975.
31. *Accumulation on a World Scale*, 1974.



32. Alavi, *op. cit.*, 1975, 1253 & 1257.
33. *ibid.*, 1255.
34. *op. cit.*, 1981, 476.
35. For details, see Gladys D'Souza, *British Rule*, especially Ch. V.
36. "Roots of the Crisis in India", *The Marxist Review*, May 1980, 403.
37. *Indian Monopoly Capital*, 103-9, quoted in: *India State and Society*, ed. M. Kurian, Orient Longman, 1975, 137 ff.
38. A. Roy, *Monopoly Capitalism in India*, Calcutta, 1976, 172.
39. *ibid.*, 169.
40. See Bipan Chandra, "Modern India and Imperialism", 1972, in: *Nationalism and Colonialism in India*, New Delhi, 1979, 204 ff.
41. See A. Roy, *Monopoly Capitalism*, Ch. 9 on collaboration; also Prabhat Patnaik, "Imperialism and the growth of Indian Capitalism", in: *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, *op. cit.*, 210-229.
42. See A. Roy, "Roots of Crisis in India", *The Marxist Review*, June 1980, 477 ff.
43. See "Capitalist Agriculture and Rural Classes in India", *EPW*, Review of Agriculture, Dec. 26, 1981.
44. Cf. Alavi 1981, *op. cit.*, 483.
45. Alavi 1981, *op. cit.*, 483; Alavi 1975, *op. cit.*, 1257.
46. Gail Omvedt, "Capitalist Agriculture and Rural Classes in India", *op. cit.*, A-153 f.
47. "Colonialism, Stages of Colonialism and the Colonial State" in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 272-285; M.N. Roy made similar points in 1921 in *India in Transition*, Bombay, 1971, cf. Wielenga, *op. cit.*, 64 ff.
48. Chandra, 280.
49. *ibid.*, 281.
50. *ibid.*, 275.
51. *ibid.*, 276.
52. *ibid.*, 280.
53. See Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale. A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment*, New York and London, Monthly Review Press, 1974; reviewed by Ranjit Sau, "Capitalism, Imperialism and Underdevelopment", in *EPW* Special Number 1975.
54. See Hamza Alavi, "The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh", in: K. Gough and H. Sharma (eds), *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*, New York 1973; quoted from *Socialist Digest*, March 1973.
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56. *ibid.*, 21.
57. B. Patankar and G. Omvedt, "The Bourgeois State in Post-Colonial Social Formation", *EPW* 31.12.1977.
58. Alavi, *op. cit.*, 7.
59. *ibid.*
60. See Biplab Dasgupta, "Class Character of the Ruling Class in India" in: *India. State and Society*, *op. cit.*, 115 ff.



61. in: *India. State and Society*, op. cit., 129 ff; see also his book, *Political Power in India*, Nature and Trendss Calcutta 1975.
- 61a. See Corinne Kumar-D'Souza, "Towards a New International Social Order", *Background Papers*, BUILD 1982, 4.
62. *Sel. Works* 1, 124.
63. See E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Vol. 1, Note B "The Bolshevik Doctrine of Self Determinaton", 414.
64. *Sel. Works* 1, 124.
65. *ibid.*
66. *ibid.*, 62.
67. *ibid.*, 120.
68. *ibid.*, 137.
69. Carr, op. cit., 412.
70. Carr, *ibid.*, 417 ff; see also Eric Hobsbawm, "Remarks on Tom Nairn's 'Modern Janus' ", *New Left Review*, Sept./Oct. 1977.
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72. See Horace B. Davis, *Nationalism and Socialism. Marxist and Labour Theories of Nationalism to 1917*, New York/London, MR Press, 1967, ch. II.
73. See Hobsbawm, op. cit.
74. *The Class Struggles in France*, *Sel. Works* 1, 227.
75. See David Mclellan, *Karl Marx, His Life and Thought*, Macmillan 1973, ch. 7.
76. Quoted by Carr, op. cit., 421.
77. See letter to Engels, 20.6.1866, *Sel. Corr.*, 167 f.
78. 10.12.1869, *Sel. Corr*, 218.
79. Marx to Kugelmann, 29.11.1869, *Sel. Corr.*, 216 f.
80. *ibid.*, 217; and Marx to Engels, 30.11.1867, *ibid.*, 184.
81. Quoted by Carr, op. cit., 422.
82. Davis, op. cit., 87.
83. Quoted in Rosa Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy*, in: *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, ed. M.A. Waters, New York, 1970, 270.
84. *ibid.*, 304.
85. *ibid.*, 305.
86. *ibid.*, 331.
87. On the Junius Pamphlet, Appendix A in: *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, op. cit., 432 ff.
88. Carr, op. cit., 423 f.
89. Quoted by Carr, op. cit., 426.
90. "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination", Lenin, *Sel. Works* 1, 576.
91. See Ajit Roy, "National Problems in India and Pre-revolutionary Russia" in: *India in the 'Seventies'*, Calcutta 1978, 52 ff.
92. Lenin, *Sel. Works* 1, 579.
93. Lenin, *Coll. Works* 20, 22; quoted by Roy, op. cit., 55.



94. Lenin, *Sel. Works* 1, 578.
95. Lenin, *Coll. works* 20, 24; quoted by Roy, *op. cit.*, 55 f.
96. Quoted by Carr, *op. cit.*, 265.
97. *ibid.*, 382.
98. *ibid.*, 377.
99. See Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, London, 1975, 47.
100. *ibid.*, 148.
101. Quoted, *ibid.*, 53.
102. *ibid.*, 84 f.
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104. *ibid.*, 20.
105. *ibid.*, 21.
106. *ibid.*, 22 f.
107. *ibid.*, 23.
108. *ibid.*, 25.
109. *ibid.*, 26.
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111. Quoted by E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 3, Penguin, 1973, 238.
112. See Comintern and National & Colonial Questions. Documents of Congresses, Communist Party Publication, New Delhi, 1973, 21 ff.
113. *ibid.*, 23.
114. See J.P. Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*. M.N.Roy and Comintern Policy 1920-1939, Bombay, O.U.P., 1971, 13 ff.
115. Cf. Comintern, *op. cit.*, 26 and 38.
116. *ibid.*, 30.
117. *ibid.*, 32.
118. Quoted by Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, *op. cit.*, 249.
119. *ibid.*
120. Comintern, *Documents*, 52.
121. Carr, *op. cit.*, 501.
122. Quoted by Carr, *ibid.*, 533 f.
123. Quoted by Carr, *Socialism in one country, 1924-1926*, vol. 3, 710.
124. Quoted by Carr, *op. cit.*, 791.
125. Haithcox, *op. cit.*, 75.
126. See Claudin, *op. cit.*, 293.
127. Comintern, *Documents*, *op. cit.*, 83.
128. *ibid.*, 85.
129. *ibid.*, 62.
130. *ibid.*, 84.
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141. Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, London NLB 1981, ch. 1.
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143. For a bibliography on Cuba, see Mclellan, *Marxism after Marx*, *op. cit.*, ch. 17.
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146. See Henri Weber, *Nicaragua. The Sandinist Revolution*, London, NLB, 1981, ch. 1.
147. *ibid.*, ch. 2.
148. *ibid.*, ch. 3.
149. *ibid.*, ch. 6.
150. See the study of Halliday/Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, *op. cit.*
151. *ibid.*, 33 ff.
152. *ibid.*, 273 ff.
153. *ibid.*, 278.
154. See reprint of interview with Amned under the title "Afghan Developments X-rayed" in: *The Marxist Review*, Sept. 1980, 102.
155. See F. Halliday, "Revolution in Afghanistan", *New Left Review*, 112, referred by W. Spohn, *iritik* 24.
156. See especially "Notes on Indian Path to Revolution", *The Marxist Review*, Oct.-Nov. 1972, reprinted July 1977; and A. Roy, "Path to Socialism in India", June, July, August 1978.
157. July 1977, 19.
158. See "Total Rectification", *Seminar*, June 1974.
159. From an interview given by K. Damodaran to *New Left Review*, published in: No. 93, Sept.-Oct. 1975, which fittingly has been uprinted in: *Prospects of Left Unity*, K.N. Panikkar (ed.), New Delhi, Enver Publ. 1979, 141 ff. This volume gives the Proceedings of the first K. Damodaran Memorial Seminar.



## CHAPTER VI

# Philosophical Outlook

## 1. Marxist Materialism

### Introduction

Does marxism imply philosophical materialism, and if so, what sort of philosophical materialism? Not only socialists and communists with a religious background, but also marxist revolutionaries such as Karl Liebknecht have denied that the materialist analysis of society (historical materialism) implies a particular materialist philosophy. The C.P. of Italy has recently declared that it no longer imposes any philosophical outlook on its members. On the other side the official Soviet-philosophy insists that dialectical materialism is an integral part of marxist theory. Again others agree that the historical materialism of Marx implies a materialist philosophical perspective, but one that differs widely from the doctrines of dialectical materialism as developed in the Soviet-Union. They tend to blame Engels and Lenin for a philosophical development leading away from Marx. Quite recently a new trend has emerged which appreciates the contributions of Engels and Lenin without falling in line with official Soviet-philosophy. The following survey can only pinpoint some aspects in a historical perspective.

### a. Marx and Engels

Marx's materialism is *anti-metaphysical*, *anti-speculative*. As a philosopher Marx grew up in the shadow of the mighty system of Hegel's thought, the culmination of German idealism and of "speculative metaphysics" as Marx called it. He continued to appreciate Hegel as a dialectical thinker later in his life. But he acknowledged Feuerbach as the philosopher who had brought down the idealistic speculation of Hegel with his materialism and thus had brought about a decisive defeat of all metaphysics by overcoming its highest and most sophisticated expression.<sup>1</sup>

Philosophical and scientific debates had been very much dominated by abstract and speculative concepts. In a passage of "Holy



Family'' Marx pokes fun at the method of philosophical speculation. From real apples, pears and almonds the abstract idea "fruit" is derived. Then "fruit" is declared to be the "essence" or "substance" of the pear, the apple, etc., and the different ordinary fruits become the manifestations of the "one Fruit". The abstraction "Fruit", that "supernatural creation of the mind", gives in its turn a "supernatural significance" to the natural fruits. They are no longer simply apples and pears, but manifestations of a higher unity, belonging to the life-process of "the Absolute Fruit".<sup>2</sup> Against such idealistic speculation materialism is the only remedy. It takes the concrete material distinctions serious and does not allow abstract creations of the mind to become the creator of things. Marx and Engels follow here a sensualist theory of knowledge in the line of Feuerbach.

Later, in the course of his scientific work, Marx modified this approach and strongly defended the need for *abstract concepts*. But he continued to oppose speculative metaphysics on the basis of such concepts. This applies also to the concept of "matter". As a concept it is needed. But it should not be used to replace the "Absolute Spirit" of speculative metaphysics as a new metaphysical principle, as the fundamental ground of all being, as an autonomous substance "Matter" which would exist independently of concrete material things. As Engels put it:

*"Matter as such is a pure creation of thought and an abstraction. We leave out of account the qualitative differences of things in lumping them together as corporeally existing things under the concept 'matter'. Hence matter as such, as distinct from definite existing pieces of matter, is not anything sensuously existing".<sup>3</sup>*

Matter exists only in particular forms, just like fruit exists only in the form of apples, pears, etc.<sup>4</sup> Recent Soviet philosophy has taken up this precaution against ontological speculation. F.V. Konstantinov writes in a basic textbook on the "Foundations of marxist philosophy":

*"In opposition to metaphysical materialism, dialectical materialism rejects the notion of a 'final', immutable essence of things, of an 'absolutely fundamental substance', from whose 'ultimate' properties and appearances everything that exists can be derived. In nature there is nothing immutable and no absolutely fundamental substance".<sup>5</sup>*

This is a new departure in Soviet philosophy as for quite some time Spinoza's concept of substance under the influence of Deborin and his followers had been used in the formulation of a materialist ontology.<sup>6</sup>



Marx' anti-metaphysical stance becomes very clear from the fact that he refuses to answer metaphysical questions from his materialist standpoint. In "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts", he dismisses the question "who begot the first man and nature, as a whole?" as a wrongly put question. It abstracts from humankind and nature which are existing. Marx advises to give up the abstraction of non-existing nature and "man" and with it the question about their creation.<sup>7</sup> Philosophy and religion have focussed on such questions as the creation and the meaning of the world. Marx rejects the idea of a creator and meaning-giving God, and he refuses to become a metaphysical materialist who ascribes to "Matter" what others ascribe to "Spirit" or "God". The world has no in-built telos, goal or purpose, independent of the aims which human beings set themselves in the course of history. The place of "Spirit" or "God" is taken by human beings, not by abstract matter in the thought of Marx. They are the only ones in the world who pursue a 'telos', who set aims, and that is how history evolves.

Marx' materialism is *historical, dialectical, practical*. Marx starts neither from the "Spirit", nor from "Matter" or "nature without man". He starts from concrete human beings and their practical activity. That is "where speculation ends" and "real, positive science" begins.<sup>8</sup> Human beings are part of nature, but they begin to distinguish themselves from the rest of nature by the practical activity of producing their means of subsistence.<sup>9</sup> In the process they change nature and themselves. And materialism has to grasp that historical process of the humankind-nature dialectic. At this point Marx distinguishes his own approach from "all previous materialism", which had conceived reality only as object, "but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively".<sup>10</sup>

The old materialism contemplated nature as an object, studied its laws, and eventually reduced everything to the operations of these laws. As a consequence a human person was to be seen as "nothing but" a machine, and his thinking as "nothing but" physical reflexes of the brain. That is how mechanical materialism "takes to misanthropy", says Marx.<sup>11</sup> It ignored that human beings as a specific part of nature take an active role in working on it, changing it, using it for their own purposes, studying it in their sciences. It abstracted from human practice. As a result Feuerbach and the materialists before him left out history, not only human history, but also the history of nature. They forgot that we always have before us an "*historical nature and a natural history*". Human activity has changed nature.

"So much is this activity, this unceasing sensuous labour and



*creation, this production, the foundation of the whole sensuous world, as it now exists that, were it interrupted only for a year, Feuerbach would not only find an enormous change in the natural world, but would very soon find that the whole world of men and his own perceptive faculty, nay his own existence, were missing".*<sup>12</sup>

This mediation of human practice applies also to the so called "pure" natural science. It does not at all contemplate and reflect pure nature, as if nature could be observed without human intervention. Trade and industry, human practice set the aims for the natural sciences. They are part of that practice. This insisting on the dialectical relationships of humankind and nature does not mean that Marx denies the "priority of external nature". That is presupposed and "remains unassailed", but that nature, "the nature that preceded human history", does no longer exist anywhere.<sup>13</sup> The nature we are confronted with is a historical nature.

The other side of this dialectic is that human history appears as "natural history". It is conditioned and shaped by material practice and thus by the interchange of persons and nature and the changing modes of production following from it. Using the term "natural history" for human history Marx sounds on the one hand a critical note. It indicates that human beings are not yet in control of their own history. But at the same time he underlines the continuity of the humankind-nature dialectic. Just as it is impossible to study nature without human beings, so it is impossible to study human beings without nature. Even when we succeed in understanding and controlling the social process, and even when we change nature according to our needs, it all remains a dialectical process within natural reality. Human labour-power continues to be "the manifestation of a force of nature".<sup>14</sup> In his work "man... opposes himself to nature as one of her own forces".<sup>15</sup> That is why Marx' philosophy of "praxis" is and remains materialist philosophy.

Natural and human history are thus closely connected. They condition each other. Yet they have to be distinguished, since human beings make the one and not the other. This distinction becomes important in the evaluation of the consequences of the scientific discoveries of *Darwin*. In an early reaction on Darwin's epochal study "On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection" which appeared in 1859, Marx found in it not only a "death-blow to 'teleology' in the natural sciences" and thus to metaphysics, but also a theory that "supports the class struggle in history from the point of view of natural science".<sup>16</sup> And Engels drew a parallel between the



discoveries of Darwin and Marx in his "Speech at the graveside of Karl Marx", saying:

*"Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history".*<sup>17</sup>

However, bourgeois thinkers were quick to exploit Darwin's theory for quite different purposes. The ideology of "Social Darwinism" applied the concepts of "natural selection" and "the survival of the fittest" taken from biology to society and argued that one should not interfere with the elimination of the weak, the unfit, in the struggle for survival. Competition was presented as a law of nature and socialism as the absurd attempt to organise the survival of the unfittest. Soon these ideas were applied to the competition between various races, justifying the imperialism of the "superior" Anglo-Saxon race or later of the Aryans as a race, and rationalising war as a means of selecting the fittest. At present there is a new wave of such Social Darwinism. Of course, this has no longer much to do with Darwin himself.<sup>18</sup>

Already Marx and especially Engels had to face this ideological use of Darwin's theories. First of all they made clear that biological laws cannot be directly applied to human history, as "human history differs from natural history in this, that we have made the former, but not the latter".<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, they note that Darwin himself has proceeded in the opposite direction. He did not apply biological laws to society, but he used concepts taken from capitalist society, such as division of labour, competition, and the "struggle for existence", a concept used by Malthus in economic theory, to apply them to plants and animals. Marx uses this observation to comment sarcastically on the animal level of capitalist society:

*"It is remarkable how Darwin recognises among beasts and plants his English society with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, 'inventions', and the Malthusian 'struggle for existence'."*<sup>20</sup>

Engels goes into a deeper critique both of Darwin's approach and of the use made of it.<sup>21</sup> He criticizes that Darwin did not distinguish selection under pressure of overpopulation, in which case indeed the strongest may make the best chance to survive, and selection by greater capacity of adaption to altered circumstances. He further points out that there is not only "struggle for existence" but also "co-operation" in organic nature. After that he calls it a childish



procedure to transfer the "struggle for existence" theory which had been taken from Hobbes and the bourgeois doctrine of competition "back again from natural history to the history of society" with the claim that now the doctrines of the war of everybody against everybody and of competition have been proved to be "eternal natural laws of society".

Why is this type of materialism which applies the laws of organic nature to human society unacceptable and bad bourgeois ideology for Engels? It is wrong not only because it is one-sided in the observation of animal society, but more so because it denies the "essential difference between human and animal society" which "consists in the fact that animals at most collect while men produce".

*"This sole but cardinal difference alone precludes the simple transfer of laws of animal societies to human societies".<sup>22</sup>*

In and through production the level of pure struggle for existence is soon left behind. Human beings produce not only means of existence, but "means of enjoyment and development". In capitalist society the problem is not that there is not enough for all to survive, but that there is too much, controlled only by a few. In that society the so-called struggle for existence is therefore something quite different, namely the struggle for control of social production and distribution. That shows, Engels concludes, that "the conception of history as a series of class struggles is already much richer in content and deeper than merely reducing it to weakly distinguished phases of the struggle for existence".<sup>23</sup>

From what we have discussed so far it can be seen that the materialism of Marx and Engels is indeed dialectical, but in a way which is quite different from what is presented as "dialectical materialism" by Soviet-philosophy. The latter uses that term for its doctrines regarding the laws which govern reality in general, whereas the term "historical materialism" is reserved for the laws governing the development of human society, as the latest chapter in the book of cosmic evolution. Marx and Engels start from the dialectic which connects humankind and nature. And in that relationship they reflect what unites and what distinguishes them. In dialectical terminology that is called the dialectic of identity and non-identity. Human beings are part of nature (identity), but they are the conscious part, they act as subjects, set purposes in the practice of production, interfere and use the laws of nature to make it serve and satisfy their needs (non-identity). In the process both are transformed, human beings and nature. In that process of metabolism human forces incorporate



themselves into natural objects, whereas natural things get incorporated into the social world of humankind.<sup>24</sup> But this does not lead to complete identity. The necessity of labour in order to procure the satisfaction of human needs from nature remains and thus non-identity.<sup>25</sup> If there is a dialectic of nature, it is this self-movement of nature, in which the human species as a part of nature becomes the agent of change through its labour.

### b. *Engels and Lenin*

It has often been observed and commented upon that later Marxism lost the revolutionary spirit of Marx—its person—and society-centered materialism. Marxist materialism acquired the contemplative character which Marx had criticised in his “Theses on Feuerbach”. Both the marxism of the Second International (Kautsky) and Soviet marxism have developed forms of materialist philosophy that ignored the crucial role of human praxis which had been highlighted by Marx. Many of those who have criticised this development have put part of the blame on Engels and Lenin, saying that their philosophical contributions have prepared the way. It is certainly true that Engels’ writings “*Anti-Duehring*” (1878), “*Dialectics of Nature*” (written 1873-86, published 1925), “*Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*” (1888) and Lenin’s “*Materialism and Empirio-criticism*” (1908) represent a shift in approach. However, it is unfair to blame them for all what has followed, be it in Kautskyanism or Stalinism and to overlook that what connects both Engels and Lenin with Marx against a type of materialist philosophy from which human praxis has disappeared altogether. This has been shown already in the previous section with regard to Engels.

It is important to read the contributions of Engels not as timeless doctrinal works but as interventions in concrete cultural and political contexts. His most influential book in which he deals with *philosophy and natural sciences*, usually called “*Anti-Duehring*”, is a polemical refutation of the teachings of a professor Duehring which had gained popularity even in Social-Democratic circles.<sup>26</sup> Duehring presented a new socialist theory “as the ultimate practical fruit of a new philosophical system”. That forced Engels to go into the whole system with all its references to natural sciences and examine its claims.<sup>27</sup>

Engels had tried to keep up with the explosive developments in the natural sciences on the basis of a division of labour with Marx who concentrated on the study of political economy. The natural sciences played a crucial role in philosophical developments as well as in the formation of popular thinking in the second part of the 19th century.



Philosophy served as the medium to popularize new insights resulting from scientific discoveries. They were presented as part of a new scientific world outlook. And people who had lost their faith in traditional religion flocked to the bringers of scientific news in order to find a new and reliable orientation. What happened in this field was, of course, also highly relevant in a political sense. Whoever could claim scientific authority for his social or political views had a huge advantage in a time in which other authorities had lost their glamour.<sup>28</sup>

The positivism of Comte was one such form of scientific philosophy which became a secular religion and an organised social and political force.<sup>29</sup> The 'vulgar' materialism of Buechner, Vogt and Moleschott became popular in the middle of the century. Marx and Engels did not agree with their reductionism which tried to explain everything in terms of universal laws of matter. But politically they were at least on the republican progressive side, apart from Vogt who after 1848 deserted to the right.<sup>30</sup> More important was a second wave of popular materialism which occurred in Germany in response to Darwin's theories and was led by the biologist Ernst Haeckel, who himself, however, claimed to be a "monist" and not a materialist. It sounded all progressive, as it was anti-clerical and scientific, but it finally led to a form of Social Darwinism with a biological justification of imperialism.<sup>31</sup>

The Social-Democratic party was theoretically not well equipped to confront these various challenges of popular philosophy adorned with scientific authority. And yet it needed to counter them. That is what prompted Engels to spend time on Herr Duehring and to offer an evaluation of the findings of the natural sciences in a marxist perspective. It has been discussed already in the previous section how he and Marx rejected Social Darwinism.

In "Anti-Duehring" and "Dialectics of Nature", Engels tries to build up an overall defense *against mechanical, reductionist materialism*. For that purpose he returns to Hegel. With the help of his dialectical method, applied to the results of the natural sciences, he finds a way to maintain the unity of the material world and at the same time to recognise the *relative autonomy of the various levels of reality* and their respective sciences. Several present-day marxist commentators who defend Engels against the critique mentioned at the beginning of this section, regret his resort to Hegel and try to show that the Hegelian language is in any case secondary. Others regret that this is not real dialectics, because human praxis is largely left out.



Engels calls dialectics the “science of inter-connections” in contrast to metaphysics which treats things in separation. Its laws are abstracted “from the history of nature and human society”

*“They are nothing but the most general laws of these two aspects of historical development, as well as of thought itself. And indeed they can be reduced in the main to three: The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa; The law of the interpenetration of opposites; The law of the negation of the negation”.*<sup>32</sup>

Such “laws of dialectics” have been used in later Soviet philosophy in a very doctrinal and deterministic manner. Engels uses them mainly to interpret the historical development of nature, and the qualitative differentiation taking place within the fundamental material unity. Thus he confirms on the one hand: “the real unity of the world consists in its materiality”,<sup>33</sup> and “motion is the mode of existence of matter”<sup>34</sup> On the other hand he refuses to reduce the higher forms of life which evolve in the course of the evolutionary process to the lower forms from which they originate. Qualitative changes—leaps—occur and the higher forms follow their own more complicated laws.<sup>35</sup> That is how he counters Social Darwinism by refusing to subsume human history under the laws of biological evolution. It also should be noted that Engels forbids to take the dialectical laws as ontological laws which determine with iron necessity what is going to happen. They are meant to explain what is happening, not to predict a far-away future. When Marx characterises the abolition of capitalist private property as a dialectical “negation of the negation”,<sup>36</sup>

*“Marx does not intend to prove that the process was historically necessary. On the contrary: only after he has proved from history that in fact the process has partially already occurred, and partially must occur in the future, he in addition characterizes it as a process which develops in accordance with a definite dialectical law”.*<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile Engels himself seems to seek the authority which natural sciences enjoyed to furnish proofs for the validity of the dialectical approach. “Nature is the proof of dialectics” and “Modern science... has furnished this proof with very rich materials increasing daily”.<sup>38</sup>

Sometimes Engels refers—in the spirit of Marx—to the crucial role of human practice. He can write that it is “precisely *the alteration of nature by men*, not solely nature as such, which is the most essential and immediate basis of human thought”.<sup>39</sup> But his preoccupation with the natural sciences and the popular philosophies derived from them



leads him often to reflect on "nature as such" and to conceive the process of knowledge in a more contemplative manner.<sup>40</sup>

This trend which connects Engels with the philosophical approach prevailing later in the Second International and in Soviet philosophy is reinforced in his study on Feuerbach (1888), where he discusses the "relation of thinking and being" as the basic question of all philosophy and accordingly divides all philosophers into "two great camps" of *idealism and materialism*. The idealists are those who assert the "primacy of spirit to nature", the latter regard "nature as primary".<sup>41</sup>

Of course, Marx also was convinced of the primacy of matter. But the thrust of his materialism differs from that of Engels. He developed his theory in the confrontation with political economy on the basis of the humankind-nature dialectics and focussing on the dialectics of human society and its communist perspective. Engels taking up the challenge of popular philosophy based on the natural sciences finds dialectical laws at work already in non-human and pre-human nature. As a result the emphasis tends to shift to cosmic and natural processes and this easily leads back to a more contemplative and metaphysical materialism.

On almost every page Engels indicates that one of his main concerns is to explain reality without resorting to any impulse or initiation or cause beyond it which he identifies with the ideas of God and creation. Matter and motion are uncreatable and indestructible and that makes such explanations impossible. Matter in eternal motion replaces all other explanations and becomes the final horizon of human history, a horizon in which it emerges and gets exterminated "without mercy"

*"It is an eternal cycle in which matter moves, ... a cycle in which the time of organic life and still more that of the life of beings conscious of nature and of themselves, is just as narrowly restricted as the space in which life and self-consciousness come into operation..."*

This relentless, merciless cycle leaves only one sort of cosmic perspective:

*"We have the certainty that matter remains eternally the same in all its transformations, that none of its attributes can ever be lost, and therefore, also, that with the same iron necessity that it will exterminate on the earth its highest creation, the thinking mind, it must somewhere else and at another time again produce it".<sup>42</sup>*

In his rather isolated excursion into the philosophical field which



resulted in the book "Materialism and Empirio-criticism" (1908), Lenin sticks rigorously to the framework of the "two great camps" which divide all philosophers, the *camp of materialism* and the *camp of idealism*.<sup>43</sup> He claims that the "basic motif" of all the philosophical utterances of Marx was nothing but the "insistence upon materialism" against all deviations towards idealism. And, of course, he has little difficulty in claiming that Engels did the same "entirely in the spirit of Marx".<sup>44</sup>

Lenin emphasised so vehemently this either-or, either materialism or idealism, against the empirio-criticists Mach and Avenarius, and their Russian followers, Bogdanov and others, because they claimed to "have 'risen above' materialism and idealism, to have transcended this 'obsolete' antithesis".<sup>45</sup> The empirio-criticists indeed tried to overcome the dichotomy between mind and matter, and to free the theory of knowledge in a positivistic way, based on the natural sciences, from the burden of philosophical concepts. Lenin wanted to show that any attempt to find a third way between materialism and idealism would serve idealism and thus the class enemy.

The empirio-criticists referred to the latest development in physics, according to which matter seemed to disappear. Lenin saw the danger that further discoveries in physics would lend themselves to the defense of idealism. He therefore excluded the question of the structure of matter, of atoms and electrons, etc., from the philosophical definition. What matters to philosophical materialism is only the assertion of the existence of objective reality—whatever its structure—as the source of our knowledge. Thus "the sole 'property' of matter with whose recognition philosophical materialism is bound up is the property of *being an objective reality*, of existing outside the mind".<sup>46</sup>

The leading Russian empirio-critics were Bolsheviks and Lenin must have been impressed by the critique of his philosophical mentor Plekhanov, who was by that time in the Menshevik camp. Plekhanov linked Bolshevik revolutionism with the "subjective idealism" of Bogdanov's theory of knowledge which took knowledge as an act of subjective organisation and not as an objective reflection of things. In order to clear Bolshevism of such an awful association with subjectivism Lenin took a rigid objectivist position in his *theory of reflections* or images, according to which sensations and concepts are reflections in the human mind of the material world.

"The fundamental distinction between the materialist and the adherent of idealist philosophy consists in the fact that the materialist regards sensation, perception, idea and the mind of man generally,



*as an image of objective reality. The world is the movement of this objective reality reflected by our consciousness''.*<sup>47</sup>

With this theory of knowledge Lenin stands at this point of his development – before the study of Hegel's dialectic – and in this polemic against the dangers of subjectivism in the tradition of contemplative materialism which Marx criticised in his "Theses". Only after his Hegel studies in 1915 he developed a more dialectical approach in his theory of knowledge. Quoting his "Philosophical Notebooks" Satinath Chakraborty can argue against the thesis that Lenin's theory of reflection would be incompatible with dialectics and would represent a retreat to pre-Marxist metaphysical materialism. Quoting the Notebooks he can show that Lenin has enriched the concept of reflection with such statements as "Man's consciousness not only reflects the objective world but creates it".<sup>48</sup> It would, however, be fair to acknowledge that it took time for Lenin to reach such insights and that his critics have a point with regard to his earlier work in "Materialism and Empirio-criticism". In a dialectical perspective it should not be difficult to admit such developments and revisions in the classics. It was Stalin who made "Materialism and Empirio-criticism" a philosophical textbook of final authority, totally ignoring the particular context in which it was written and the limitations of Lenin who had not involved himself in philosophical arguments up to that point.

At earlier occasions Lenin had left it to Plekhanov and others to tackle philosophical problems. And he had closely co-operated with Bogdanov in spite of the empiriomonist theories which the latter published from 1904 onwards. There were also Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries among the empirio-critics, but Bogdanov and two other Bolsheviks, Lunacharsky and Bazarov, played a leading role among them. They belonged to the left wing which after 1907 opposed the participation in the Tsarist Duma (parliament), and proposed to withdraw the social-democratic members, which was called "Otsovism". They challenged Lenin's "dictatorship" and his "deviation towards Menshevism".<sup>49</sup> In 1909 they were expelled from the Bolshevik leadership.

Lunacharsky was together with Gorky involved in the attempt to create a socialist religion. They tried to provide a secular alternative to the "God-seekers" and the reviving interest in religion after the defeat of the 1905 revolution. They presented themselves as the "God-builders", replacing God by humanity in the style of Feuerbach, while ascribing the fundamental act of God-building to the revolution of the proletariat.



At this juncture, in the dark years after the defeat of the revolution Lenin does not want such dangerous deviations to divide the diminished ranks of the Bolsheviks. Beating off the challenge of Bogdanov as an alternative leader he is fighting the “divine otsovists” who with their unorthodox ventures, be it empiriomonism or socialist religion, expose the ranks of the party to all sorts of temptations. They open the door to idealism and thus to fideism, i.e. to religious doctrines which put faith (fides) in the place of knowledge. “Fideism” serves the class-enemies as it keeps the masses ignorant and passive. In every semblance of softening the materialist outlook, in every trace of scepticism regarding the possibility to know the objective reality, Lenin senses the opening of some back-door escape routes from the struggle in the historical arena. The only way to lock all the doors to fideism and obscurantism is to defend materialism without concessions.

*“Once you deny objective reality, given us in sensation, you have already lost every weapon against fideism, for you have slipped into agnosticism or subjectivism—and that is all that fideism requires. If the perceptual world is objective reality, then the door is closed to every other ‘reality’ or quasi-reality”.*<sup>50</sup>

Thus Lenin demands partisanship in philosophy, just like Marx and Engels “were partisans in philosophy” fighting all deviations from materialism. While this meant primarily the need to choose between materialism and idealism, the principle of partisanship also implied the conviction that philosophical choices have political consequences, so that philosophy cannot be considered something beyond the political confrontations. This idea of political partisanship in philosophy was later used by Stalin to crush all critical and creative thinking.

Lenin himself revised his understanding of the basic choice between materialism and idealism while studying Hegel. In his notes “On the questions of dialectics” (1915) he remarks:

*“Philosophical idealism is **only** nonsense from the standpoint of crude, simple, metaphysical materialism. From the standpoint of **dialectical** materialism, on the other hand, philosophical idealism is a **one-sided**, exaggerated... development (inflation...) of one of the features, aspects, facets of knowledge into an absolute, **divorced** from matter, from nature”.*<sup>51</sup>

In other words, one can learn from idealism, especially from Hegel’s dialectics. The main contrast becomes that between dialectical and non-dialectical thinking. “Intelligent idealism is closer to intelligent materialism than stupid materialism”.<sup>52</sup>



c. *Soviet-philosophy and Stalin*

At the time of Lenin's death (1924) there was not yet one official philosophy. Marx and Engels and Plekhanov were considered as the main authorities, but vivid debates were going on. Two trends were competing for a dominant position in the philosophical field: the "dialecticians", led by Deborin, and the "mechanists". Shortly before his death Lenin had made some suggestions to the editors of the philosophical magazine "Pod Znamenem Marksizma" (Under the Banner of Marxism). In order to promote the cause of militant materialism they should build on the one hand an "alliance with those modern natural scientists who incline towards materialism" and on the other hand function as "a kind of 'Society of Materialist Friends of Hegelian Dialectics' " by arranging for a "Systematic study of Hegelian dialectics from a materialist standpoint".<sup>53</sup> One could say that the "mechanists" followed the first suggestion and the dialecticians the second.<sup>54</sup>

The *mechanists* argued that the scientific world-view of marxism was based on the findings of all the natural and social sciences and that there was no place for an over-all philosophy to guide or judge the positive sciences. The Hegelian dialectic superimposed on the sciences would introduce categories and considerations which were not the outcome of scientific investigation. And there was no need for it as natural sciences were capable of explaining all processes in the universe in physical and chemical terms.<sup>55</sup> This position defended the autonomy of the sciences against philosophical interference, but, of course, it implied a philosophical position as well.

That becomes clear from Bukharin's presentation of historical materialism already mentioned earlier. His approach is based on the assumption that the methods of natural sciences can be applied in the social sciences as well. All social phenomena are determined by unchanging causal laws and it is the task of sciences to study these causal connections while keeping in mind the truth of dialectical materialism that all things are interconnected. Materialism which takes the mind as a function of matter asserts the primacy of matter in society as well, and that means that ideas, art, religion, etc., have to be derived from material productive activities. The outcome, Bukharin's theory of society, is indeed "mechanistic". The dialectic is reduced to a theory of equilibrium and all superstructural phenomena are in a one-sided way deduced from technological developments and the like.

The *dialecticians* or *Deborinists* defended the need of a systematic



marxist philosophy. It should consist of 1) dialectical materialism as a general theory of knowledge, 2) a theory of the dialectics of nature with a methodology for the natural sciences and 3) historical materialism for the study of the dialectics of history. By demanding a guiding role for dialectical materialism as an overall philosophy the road was paved for the party's supervision of all sciences leading to the well-known total control in Stalin's time.

The publication of Engels' "Dialectics of Nature" in 1925 and of Lenin's "Philosophical Notebooks" in 1929 strengthened—for the time being—the position of the Deborinists. The mechanists were condemned and the dialecticians occupied the dominant positions in 1929. Such philosophical battles were meanwhile conducted in political style. But their victory did not last. It was the time of Stalin's decisive turn in economic policies and the defeat of Trotsky on the one hand and Bukharin on the other. Stalin demanded active support from the philosophers for his party-line claiming the principle of "partisanship" in philosophy which had been proclaimed by Lenin. As the philosophical exercises of the Deborinists appeared to be too remote and abstract and neutral, Stalin accused them of "Menshevizing idealism" which somehow was linked with Trotskyism also. Just like the mechanists had been associated with the "right deviation" of Bukharin — forgetting that the latter had produced his mechanistic theories in 1920 at a time that he was rather guilty of a leftist deviation in politics — so the dialecticians were accused of serving a "leftist deviation". The journal "Pod Znamena Marksizma" got a new editorial staff and a new task, namely to fight for the party-line at the philosophical front by exposing all deviations from Leninism.<sup>56</sup>

From then onwards official philosophy in the Soviet-Union lost all critical content. It became a matter of "quoting scriptures", the classics of Marx, Engels and Lenin, to whom from 1930 onwards Stalin was added, of praising the unfallible wisdom of Stalin and the party, and of avoiding any sign of independent thinking which might land its thinker into the camps of death. To steer a safe course became easier once Stalin had included his version of dialectical and historical materialism in the "History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik): Short Course" which was published in 1938 and remained the highest authority for marxist doctrines for more than 15 years. It was a catechism which a whole generation of Soviet citizens had to know by heart and no philosopher or scientist could afford to state anything without "proving" it with the help of quotations from this source.

Stalin declared that the dialectical method has four basic



characteristics: it assumes that all phenomena in nature are interconnected; that they are all in a state of movement; that changes in quantity give rise to changes in quality; and that contradictions are inherent in all things. In this account of dialectical laws the law of the negation of the negation is left out. Regarding *materialism* Stalin mentions three basic characteristics: that the world is by its nature material and that all phenomena are forms of matter in motion; that matter is an objective reality existing outside and independent of our minds, the mind being a secondary reflection of matter; and that everything in the world is knowable.

*Dialectical materialism*, characterised in this way, is presented as the basic philosophy of marxism. *Historical materialism* is derived from it. It is an application of the principles and laws of dialectical materialism to the study of history and society. In this way Stalin's catechism combines the "mechanist" and the "Deborinist" approach. With Deborin he starts from an overall guiding philosophy — dialectical materialism — and with Bukharin he applies mechanically principles and methods, established on the basis of non-human nature, to the study of society.

The question is not so much what is the content of this philosophical construction, but rather what was its *function*. For most of his doctrinal statements Stalin could quote some classical authority. He was not the first to distinguish dialectical and historical materialism in this way and to define dialectics and materialism in this manner. What is decisive is that these formulations are now brought together in an authoritative doctrinal system which is not meant to serve as an orientation in searching the truth, be it in science or politics, not as a guide for practice, but which only serves the purpose to discipline the party and society at large, the sciences, cultural life and the international communist movement. It was a philosophical dogmatism permeated by the formalism and lack of imagination which is typical of all bureaucratism, and it was used as a weapon of bureaucratic repression of intellectual and cultural life.

Marx, Engels and Lenin went into theoretical studies in order to acquire a more reliable understanding of reality which would guide them and the working class in their struggle. Their first concern was a critical, enlightening analysis of society. Historical materialism provided them with analytical tools for a well-founded orientation to the revolutionary struggle of the working class. Their policies were based on continuous analysis of the changing situation. And their philosophical reflections aimed at dismantling the theoretical pre-



suppositions and claims which served the consolidation of capitalist society, and providing an alternative outlook to those struggling to overcome capitalism.

Under Stalin, however, historical materialism lost its dominant role. Concrete, critical analysis did not take place any more. Policies were decided in a pragmatist way, as for example the totally unprepared change in policies in 1929. The task of intellectuals was no longer to prepare policies by an analysis of the dilemmas and alternatives, but to justify whatever the party or its leader had decided as the application of the cosmic laws of dialectical materialism, and to denounce all who opposed the party-line in this or that policy as enemies of marxism.

This transformation of marxism from critical theory into an instrument of automatic justification of the ruler and condemnation of the dissenters stifled not only political life in a murderous way – those accused of deviations were liquidated – but it also affected in an unprecedented way art, culture and even the sciences. The philosophy which proclaimed the primacy of matter actually practised the primacy of the party and its leader even over the laws of nature. The party decided over the validity of Einstein's relativity theory and the quantum theory, launching campaigns against "idealism in physics". And the party supported the disastrous experiments of Lysenko who promised to revolutionize Soviet biological science in accordance with Marxism-Leninism dismissing genetic theories based on heredity as bourgeois. Geneticists who opposed such views on scientific grounds were sent to perish in concentration camps.

Stalin's dominance over the international communist movement secured the victory of his "dialectical and historical materialism" over all other trends of marxist philosophy. Heretical thinkers like Lukacz and Korsch in the nineteen twenties, or Bloch and Kofler in the forties and fifties had to submit or quit. Only some who were beyond control, such as Gramsci in Mussolini's prisons, Mao in the caves of Yenan, and the philosophers of "Praxis" in Tito's Yugoslavia, pursued the path of philosophical inquiry in a marxist perspective in new ways which eventually were closer to the original intentions of Marx and Engels. Soviet philosophy itself slowly revived after Stalin's death. New discussions developed, cautious changes took place. But there was no scope for a critical evaluation of Stalinism on the basis of a historical materialist analysis of Soviet society. Given the limitations of bureaucratic control, the more dynamic and fruitful developments in marxist thinking took place elsewhere.



#### d. Other perspectives

Different routes were taken to find alternatives to Stalinist dogmatism. In Europe there was a wave of existentialist humanist interpretations of Marx focussing on the question of alienation and anthropological questions. Annoyed and bored by the sterilities of official dialectical materialism a growing number of marxist and non-marxist thinkers were fascinated by the depth and relevance of the young Marx' analysis of human alienation in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, which had been published only in 1932. In the initial phase there were strong tendencies to isolate these anthropological questions from other questions of marxist theory. But after some time a certain balance was struck. Some aspects of this discussion will be touched upon in the next section on "Marxist Humanism".

The French marxist Henri Lefebvre had already indicated an alternative to Stalin in his study on "Dialectical materialism", written in 1935 and published after Stalin's Short Course in 1939. In it he showed that for Marx the fundamental dialectic was the dialectic of history, based on the dialectic of labour and including the dialectic of alienation in class-society. The dialectical materialism of Marx refers to the dialectic of history which arises from human praxis. Only cautiously Marx extended the validity of dialectical concepts to the study of the objects of the natural sciences. Thus Lefebvre restored the *central position of praxis* in marxist theory.

The Hungarian marxist Georg Lukács, who had played a leading role in the short lived Hungarian Soviet republic of 1918, had published his "History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics" in 1923.<sup>57</sup> Taking the interaction of subject and object and the unity of theory and practice as the crucial elements of dialectics, he had criticised Engels for applying the dialectical method to nature and more indirectly Lenin for his undialectical understanding of cognition as reflection. Under Stalin he recalled these "errors". In the last years before his death (1971), he worked on an "Ontology of Social Being" in which the themes of Marx, respectively of historical materialism, and especially that of "labour" occupy the central place. *Labour* is the central category of Marx' materialism. It is a necessity imposed by nature. In their labour human beings have to recognise the laws of nature. But at the same time they are setting their own aims in labour, making nature serve their own purposes. Other forms of social praxis can be understood on the lines of this model provided by labour. This "teleological positing", this setting of aims, distinguishes the human species within the reality of nature, as both Marx and Engels have



pointed out. The natural basis of production remains (use-value), but natural laws do not apply to society which moves more and more from natural to social being.<sup>58</sup>

The Italian marxist Gramsci whose prison writings became influential only in the 1960's vehemently opposed the prevailing trend in marxist tradition which saw the defense of materialism against idealism as the main task. For him the main enemy is not idealism, but transcendence and metaphysics. And vulgar materialism with a concept of "matter" as eternal and absolute is metaphysical as well.<sup>59</sup> Gramsci is interested in spelling out what the "new materialism" is about which Marx contrasted with all previous materialism (Feuerbach theses). And he proposes to take it as radical *immanentism*, as a new world outlook that refuses to speculate on anything beyond what can be known in the framework of human history and human praxis.

He strongly criticises Bukharin's proposal to split marxism into scientific sociology (historical materialism) on the one hand and philosophy (dialectical materialism) on the other hand. This means to dismiss the fundamental function of *dialectic in history*, politics and society. Dialectics is not something separate, it is at the heart of the historical process. And marxism is the integral new philosophy which grasps this dialectical character of history.

*"Separated from the theory of history and politics philosophy cannot be other than metaphysics, whereas the great conquest in the history of modern thought, represented by the philosophy of praxis, is precisely the concrete historicisation of philosophy and its identification with history".<sup>60</sup>*

The attempt to "reduce everything to a single ultimate or final cause" is metaphysical and a "manifestation of the 'search for God' ".<sup>61</sup> The assumption of metaphysical materialism of an "extra-historical and extra-human objectivity" can be seen as "a hangover of the concept of God, precisely in its mystic form of a conception of an unknown God". Objective means always objective for human understanding, as Engels indicated when he wrote that "the unity of the world consists in its materiality demonstrated by the long and laborious development of philosophy and natural science", i.e. by the development of human knowledge.<sup>62</sup> The point of the new outlook of marxism is not that it is "materialist", which still could be a metaphysical statement, but that it is historical, immanent, secular, humanist, and rational, i.e. completely freed from transcendental, a-historical, extra-human metaphysical and mystical assumptions.<sup>63</sup>



*"Matter as such therefore is not our subject but how it is socially and historically organised for production, and natural science should be seen correspondingly as essential an historical category, a human relation"*.<sup>64</sup>

That means that natural sciences should be located in a historical perspective. That is the opposite of deriving historical laws from the natural sciences, as for example Bukharin did.<sup>65</sup>

From a very different context, from the context of revolutionary practice, arose the contributions of Mao Tse-tung. As Luckács and Gramsci Mao placed social *practice* at the heart of the marxist theory of knowledge. He held his Yen-an lectures "On Practice. On the Relation between Knowledge and Practice, between Knowing and Doing" in 1937, at a time that Stalinist dogmatism was reigning supreme in the world communist movement. He did not attack Stalin directly, but his propositions, aiming at a rejection of dogmatism, deviated from official dialectical materialism. Inspired by revolutionary practice he comes close to the spirit of the Feuerbach Theses. It starts with the critique of pre-Marxian materialism which "examined the problem of knowledge apart from the social nature of man and apart from his historical development". Dialectical materialism, on the other hand, understands the "dependence of knowledge on social practice", be it in material production, or in other spheres of practical life, especially in class struggle. For marxists "man's social practice alone is the criterion of the truth of his knowledge of the external world".<sup>66</sup>

Also in his essay "On Contradiction" Mao follows his own path, far away from a contemplative type of dialectical materialism. He takes "the law of contradiction in things, that is, the law of the unity of opposites" as "the basic law of materialist dialectics", quoting as his first authority the Lenin of the "Philosophical Notebooks" and the "Conspectus on Hegel" rather than the Lenin of "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism".<sup>67</sup> In that perspective the two opposing world outlooks are not materialism and idealism but "the metaphysical conception and the dialectical conception" of the law of development of the universe. Materialist dialectics studies the "internal and necessary self-movement of things and thus "combats the theory of external causes, or of an external motive force, advanced by metaphysical mechanical materialism and vulgar evolutionism".<sup>68</sup> The main purpose of his further reflections is to develop an analytical sense how to handle complex contradictions in political practice.

The successful Chinese revolution seemed to confirm the validity of Mao's philosophy of practice and of his understanding of dialectics. In



the ups and downs of the dramatic developments in China after Mao came to power both the dynamism and the drawbacks of his approach have become visible. The Marxists had learnt to give great importance to human and moral factors. In spite of inferior military technology and economic resources, they had won. As Mao had put it beforehand in 1938:

*“Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things, that are decisive. The contest of strength is not only a contest of military and economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale. Military and economic power is necessarily wielded by people”.*<sup>69</sup>

This insight enabled them to mobilise the people and its resources in a fruitful way in the gigantic tasks of economic reconstruction after the victory of 1949.

But this trust in the capacity of the people turned sometimes into an unrealistic ignoring of the objective limits of the Chinese economy and of the importance of solid knowledge of the laws of nature in the “Great Leap Forward” of 1958 and in the Cultural Revolution after 1966. It is true, people were encouraged to be simultaneously “red” and “expert”. But the materialist basis of human practice, the limits set by nature and the conditions set by natural laws in the labour-nature dialectic were sometimes ignored, it seems. The human will was expected to be able to do miracles, to overcome all obstacles. Scientific education was neglected, the solid knowledge of natural processes was less important than knowing the quotations of the Great Helmsman by heart.

The point is not the question of material or moral incentives which has often been raised from the Soviet side. Whether the stick of Stalin or the carrot of his successors—with the stick in the background—make the economy work or whether people can be enthused by a vision of a new society is a problem of the understanding of human nature and human needs. The problem is whether or not those revolutionary marxists who have placed human praxis at the centre tend to ignore the natural limits and conditions. However, this seems to be not so much a general philosophical question, but one arising out of the difficulties of building socialism under conditions of economic backwardness. After all Stalin, without philosophising on human practice, also tried to impose the human will, more precisely *his* will, on the reluctant reality of the Russian economy, as he pushed through his “revolution from above” with the brutal means of state repression. It seems revolutionaries in a hurry have difficulties to pay their respect



to the natural side in historical and dialectical materialism. Turning back to the Marxian materialist dialectic of human species and nature, the task seems to be to find the balance between the creative imagination and dynamic drive of human beings pursuing their purposes in the interaction with nature and in the transformation of society, and the sobering recognition of the objective reality of nature and its laws which sets limits and determines to what extent and how human beings can achieve their purposes.

## 2. Socialist humanism

### a. Althusser's anti-humanism

Marxist and non-marxist scholars have presented Marx as standing in the tradition of European humanism and making his own distinct contribution to it. The Polish marxist philosopher Adam Schaff states:

*“Man is the starting point and final aim of socialism, and it is man's purposive activity that brings it into being. Humanism is the outlook which sees the all-sided development of the human individual as the goal of human activity. Socialist as distinct from other kinds of humanism links the realisation of this goal with the specific social and economic aims of socialism. Marxism took its point of departure from humanism, and in theory and practice its concern has been with human affairs”.*<sup>70</sup>

The Czech theologian Lochman, to quote one more instance, sees in Marx a first rank representative of European humanism who created a new “humanism of labour” which integrates traditions of classical humanism and the humanism of natural sciences.<sup>71</sup>

The French philosopher Althusser and his school developed a version of marxism which became very influential at least in academic circles in the 1960s and 1970s. Althusser opposed the humanist interpretations of Marx which focus on the central role of human beings as the subjects of history. In order to arrive at a scientific understanding of society marxist theory has to focus not on the conscious activities of the human subject but on the unconscious structures which these activities presuppose. He presents the scientific breakthrough of Marx, his outlines of scientific socialism, as a break with the traditions of bourgeois humanism, as a “theoretical anti-humanism”.<sup>72</sup>

Althusser writes in the post-Stalin period in which both marxists and non-marxists discussed the newly discovered young Marx, the author of the “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts”, whose analysis of



alienation and emancipation became a central focus of attention against the background of the de-humanisation under Stalinism. The communist rulers in Eastern Europe also stressed the values of socialist humanism which could unite communists and non-communists in the construction of socialism. Althusser saw in this humanist talk the danger of petty-bourgeois values undermining the firm foundations of scientific socialism and hampering the class struggle. While criticising Stalin he wanted to avoid falling back on an illusionary humanism. He does not deny that the young Marx all through and the mature Marx occasionally still was interested in the human subject, its alienation, and in the true emancipation of the human species. That was indeed a form of humanism which the anthropological Marx-interpretations had highlighted. But that humanism of the early Marx has to be rejected, even if it occurs in the later Marx, for the sake of a proper discovery and distinction of the real breakthrough achieved by the mature Marx. Althusser speaks of an "epistemological break" in which Marx gives up the Hegelian idea of a subject of history and starts studying history with structural concepts such as "forces of production" and "relations of production". From that point onwards he analyses history as "a process without a subject" and thus presents a scientific, methodologically anti-humanist theory.

What does Althusser have in mind when he identifies humanism as a bourgeois tradition? He starts from the insight that all bourgeois ideology centres around an appeal to the *isolated individual* as the subject of action. The individual is seen as the subject of economic needs and economic activity, of legal contracts, and of political action as voter. In all areas of life it depends on individual efforts whether somebody succeeds. All bourgeois talk of freedom and equality presupposes these individual subjects.

According to Althusser Marx breaks with this humanism which makes the individual the subject of history in his scientific analysis of society. He gives a *structural analysis* in which the relations of production and not human subjects play the fundamental role. The human subjects appear no longer—as in bourgeois theory—as the creators of wealth and of history, but as the bearers of structural relations, for example as representatives of capital and labour. Marx discovered the crucial role of the material and technological conditions of production. He presented the mode of production rather than "man" as the key to a scientific analysis of society. In that sense marxism is "theoretical anti-humanism".

This interpretation of Althusser may have a valid point in warning



against idealistic illusions regarding the unlimited capacity of human beings to make history as they wish. Its structuralist approach has helped to elaborate a sophisticated methodology to analyse the structures which condition human action, avoiding a simplistic reductionism of superstructures to the economic base.<sup>73</sup> But as an over-all interpretation of Marx it lacks the revolutionary spirit of Marx—maybe under the impact of the imposing structures of present-day capitalism—whose scientific explanations aimed at human beings coming into their own as subjects of history in the socialist or communist transformation of the world.

Of course, Marx would share the critique of bourgeois individualism, of putting the subject of legal contracts, parliamentary elections and moral virtues on the throne of history. But that does not at all mean that he would agree to Althusser's removal of human beings from the central stage of society replacing them by a complex set of structures. It is true that Marx in "Capital" analyses the structures of the capitalist economy. He presents capitalists and labourers as nothing but representatives of "capital" and "labour power". He shows that the workers have become appendages of machines. He analyses how in the process of accumulation of capital the laws of capital operate independently of the individual human will.

All that is part of his scientific analysis. But what Althusser overlooks is that Marx with his scientific analysis is not presenting a new general truth, but that he is involved in a concrete critique of the capitalist mode of production. It is capitalism which turns the productive process against the human beings involved in it, degrading them, alienating them, bleeding them to death, crushing them. In this critique Marx is particularly concerned to show that the confrontation is not, as it appears to be, a confrontation of capital and labour, but of dead labour dominating and exploiting *living labour* on the basis of the capitalist mode of production. That is to say, human labour is at the heart of the process, but it is reified, alienated, subordinated to the laws of motion of capital. Human power over nature, human productivity has increased tremendously, but this has happened at the cost of the individual labourers. From subjects they have turned into objects. Under capitalist conditions the material and technological conditions have indeed become decisive over against the subjective element of living labour. But Marx does not present that in order to reject humanistic illusions, but in order to criticise it in a socialist perspective.

It is exactly his critique of the bourgeois economists that they



“identify past labour with capital” and “emphasize the *objective* elements of production and over-estimate their importance as against the *subjective elements*, living, immediate labour”. They think that capital controls labour, forgetting that capital itself is the product of labour. “The producer is therefore controlled by the products, the subject by the object”, that is, in capitalist society and in its political economy.<sup>74</sup> Marx continues:

*“The economists ascribe a false importance to the material factors of labour compared with labour itself in order to have also a **technological** justification for the **specific** social form, i.e. that **capitalist** form, in which the relationship of labour to the conditions of labour is turned upside-down, so that it is not the worker who makes use of the conditions of labour, but the conditions of labour which make use of the worker”.*<sup>75</sup>

Obviously Marx is not ready to accept the upside-down relationship of conditions of labour and workers as a permanent thing for all times to come. Althusser may say that Marx sometimes forgot his own scientific approach. But it seems to be rather central to his work throughout—as we have seen in ch. 2 on the “critique of capitalism”—that he points to the crucial role of the subjective factor, of labour. Again and again he translates “capital” back into “dead labour”, moving from the appearance of things to the underlying productive activity of human beings. That is reified under capitalism, but Marx looks forward to the time in which the upside-down relationship will be reversed. Then the associated producers would bring production “under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature” and they would achieve this “under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature”. That again would be the basis for “the true realm of freedom” in which the “development of human energy... is an end in itself”.<sup>76</sup>

That is indeed humanistic language and a humanistic perspective, with a vision of human emancipation even beyond a “humanism of labour”. This humanism certainly differs fundamentally from a humanism which centres upon the isolated individual. It is based on the assumption of the human person as a social being and therefore looks forward to human emancipation through associated human beings. But that does not mean that there is no connection between the vision of Marx and preceding humanist traditions.

Althusser does not like Lenin’s suggestion that Marx “continued and consummated the three main ideological currents of the nineteenth century, as represented by the three most advanced countries: classical



German philosophy, classical English political economy, and French socialism combined with French revolutionary doctrines in general".<sup>77</sup> Althusser wants to emphasize a clean break. But Lenin presupposes a dialectical continuity in which Marx integrates the positive insights and aspirations of earlier traditions on a new level. Almost every page which Marx has written confirms this continuity. Marx refers not only to the three currents mentioned by Lenin, but he quotes at crucial points—not just in an ornamental way—Shakespeare, Dante, the classical Greek writers and many others to express or to reinforce his own views. His wide cultural horizon makes him indeed an outstanding representative of European humanism reminding of the great figures of the Renaissance with their universal orientation. As such he sets standards for socialist humanism which has to integrate the human heritage on a universal scale.

*b. Marx's philosophy of the human species*

For a long time orthodox marxists have been reluctant to make room for a marxist anthropology. (The word anthropology, which means doctrine about "anthropos"—human being, gives us one more escape route from the sexism in the english language which identifies "human" and "male" in the word "man". Otherwise we use "human being", "humankind", "human species", "person", etc. to avoid that one-sided being "man".) They were and maybe still are afraid that a distinct reflection on human nature would open the bulwark of dialectical and historical materialism to bourgeois ideas, idealist subjectivism and all sorts of individualism. They had ignored Marx' warning in his "Theses on Feuerbach" against a contemplative materialism which does not conceive of human practice and subjectivity: "Hence it happened that the *active* side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism".<sup>78</sup> They argued that the young Marx indulged in anthropological reflections only as long as he had not discovered historical materialism. But less and less, serious marxist scholars—apart from the Althusser school—are ready to defend this position.

There is a growing literature of contributions to a marxist anthropology which draws inspiration from a fresh reading of Marx. Georg Lukács has inspired a number of Hungarian marxist philosophers as Istvan Meszaros and Agnes Heller to contribute to a marxist anthropology.<sup>79</sup> Important contributions have further come from Marxist thinkers in Yugoslavia around the journal "Praxis".<sup>80</sup> However, let us concentrate on Marx himself who is the starting point for their quest.<sup>81</sup>



Not only the young Marx but the whole Marx has a philosophical perspective on the human species. This is the central focus in his seminal "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" from Paris 1844, in which he reflects his first encounter with economic theory in an anthropological perspective. But it continues in his later work, less elaborate but not less crucial. Repeatedly Marx points at basic characteristics of human existence which are valid beyond the limits of particular modes of production. This is clear from "Grundrisse" and from "Capital" itself, especially in the analysis of the labour process as the heart of the matter. In chapter 2 some of the main aspects of the anthropological presuppositions and implications of Marx' critique of capitalism have been discussed. Marx' reflections on "human labour" and on "human needs" form indeed a solid base for the development of a marxist anthropology. Presupposing the sections on "de-humanisation of labour", "destruction of nature" and "human needs" in Ch. 2, we now discuss Marx' anthropology in a dialectical-materialist, socialist-humanist and aesthetic-spiritual perspective.

1. The *dialectical-materialist perspective* distinguishes the Marxian understanding of human nature from that of mechanical materialism on the one hand and from that of dualistic idealism on the other hand. The expression "dialectical materialism" has to be understood here in the sense of Marx, not in the sense of Soviet philosophy. It denotes Marx' view of the dialectical process of the human species evolving out of Nature through its distinct productive interaction with Nature. Mechanical materialism reduces the human being to the movements of physical matter. Dualist idealism separates mind and matter as two substances which have nothing in common. It thinks of the individual ego as independent of its environment, as the subject which approaches the alien object of nature and eventually tries to master it.

Marx' dialectical approach sees the human species as part of nature evolving as it starts regulating and controlling the material re-actions between itself and Nature according to its own purposes.<sup>82</sup> They form neither a monistic, undifferentiated unity, nor are they opposed to each other in a dualistic manner. They form an evolving dialectical totality, in which the human species "opposes" itself "to Nature as one of her own forces", in the process changing both the external world and human nature.<sup>83</sup>

At the origin of this dynamic process are material *needs*. What distinguishes human beings from all sorts of animals is that they need to work in order to satisfy their hunger and other needs. Animals satisfy their needs in an immediate way, they consume directly. Human beings



have to produce before they can consume. And in order to be able to produce they create tools and other objects which are not for direct consumption. That is how culture develops, and needs beyond the needs of direct material consumption. Discoveries are made, new needs arise, new forms of production develop, new capacities and skills evolve, nature is further transformed, human culture expands. In the process more and more areas of nature are drawn into the interaction (metabolism) of humankind and nature. The "unorganic body of man" grows. The human species develops its potential to relate to all natural forces and thus to become universal in its relation to nature.<sup>84</sup>

2. The *perspective of socialist humanism* distinguishes the Marxian anthropology from bourgeois individualism. Marx affirms the central role of human subjectivity in history and the perspective of human emancipation from all fetters and blindly ruling forces that enslave humankind. That qualifies him as a humanist. But he distinguishes himself from other humanist traditions by stating that it is not the human being as single individual who is the subject of history. It is individuals as social beings, as members of the human species, and that means concretely it is human beings in concrete social relations who make history and try to achieve human emancipation.

In the introductory part of "Grundrisse" Marx criticises the concept of independent individuals as a typical product of rising capitalism in the eighteenth century. It is in the society of free competition that "the individual appears detached from the natural bonds" which made him part of a limited human group before. But the thinkers of the 18th century projected this historical product and this ideal, the *bourgeois individual*, back into the past and made it the starting point of history. For a long time in history the individual belonged to a greater whole of family, clan, communal society, and was dependent on it. Only in the eighteenth century the "isolated individual" appears. But that itself is only possible on the basis of a highly developed society.

*"The human being is in the most literal sense... an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society".<sup>85</sup>*

And thus he remains a part of society and cannot be understood apart from it.

In his "Theses on Feuerbach" Marx states that the human essence is to be found in "the *ensemble of the social relations*". The first part of the 6th thesis reads as follows:



*“Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the **human** essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each simple individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations”.*<sup>86</sup>

This is indeed a statement with far-reaching consequences. Here Marx distinguishes himself from all theories that identify “man” primarily with single individuals. Marx considers this to be an impossible abstraction. One cannot separate the individuals from society. They are essentially social beings existing in social relations. The human essence therefore cannot be located in individuals seen as separated from these relations.

Marx wants to avoid loose talk about human nature and human individuals in general, as if it does not matter whether someone is master or slave, high caste or untouchable, patriarchal head of the household or maid servant, capitalist or worker, as if human values, human capacities and aspirations are equally present under all conditions.<sup>87</sup> Althusser and his followers conclude from this that individuals are to be seen as bearers of relations only and that therefore only the social relations matter.<sup>88</sup>

But that is not the thrust of Marx’s argument against Feuerbach and other abstract humanists. He wants them to analyse the concrete conditions under which people live, to find out why they take refuge in religion and why they fail to realise their human potential. Instead of contemplating about abstract single individuals—in accordance with the assumptions of bourgeois civil society—they should see what happens to people as subsistence peasants or wage-labourers as they exist in their social relations. The purpose is not to declare these relations to be the primary factor, but to equip individuals—as workers, as exploited and oppressed, living in relations of exploitation and oppression—to become active, to become practical, to become revolutionary, to change the circumstances which hinder human beings to develop themselves and cripple them instead, and so to move to “human society” or “socialised humanity”.<sup>89</sup>

The “Manifesto of the Communist Party” does not end with a reflection on changing structures. Neither does it end with an appeal to human beings in general to establish human brotherhood in a classless society—forgetting the relations in which capitalists and landlords live and are likely to ignore such an appeal. It ends with an appeal to the workers to unite, to act as comrades and to shake off the chains which fetter them and thus human development. That is Marx’s concrete, militant, socialist humanism. It addresses itself to the exploited in class



society, and it aims at a society in which there won't be any more structures of exploitation. In such a society the appeal to human beings in their universality, no longer separated and antagonised, would become meaningful.

That the human essence is located in the species has important consequences for Marx' dialectical interpretation of the *achievements and failures of capitalism*. The great contributions of capitalism in his humanistic perspective are the *socialisation of labour* and the creation of the world-market. Both have opened new dimensions for the human species. Under capitalism this happened at the cost of the concrete individuals. In socialism they are expected to harvest the fruits.

In Capital I, in chapter XIII on "Co-operation", Marx points at the social force, the collective power which arises from *co-operation* as a capacity which far exceeds the sum total of what individuals working in isolation would be able to achieve. He reminds of the gigantic structures, the palaces and pyramids, created by ancient civilisations. And he analyses why even in the construction of a small building 12 masons working together, "in their collective working day of 144 hours make much more progress... than one mason could make working for 12 days, or 144 hours. The reason is, that a body of men working in concert has hands and eyes both before and behind, and is, to a certain degree, omnipresent".<sup>90</sup> Co-operation not only saves time etc., it also stimulates. Marx speaks here of a "stimulation of the animal spirits that heighten the efficiency of each individual workman... The reason of this is that man is if not as Aristotle contends, a political, at all events a social animal".<sup>91</sup> In various ways co-operation increases productivity on a qualitative new level. Marx calls it "the social productive power of labour, or the *productive power of social labour*", a power which is "due to co-operation itself".

*"When the labourer co-operates systematically with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species".<sup>92</sup>*

The individual is very limited in what he can produce and achieve. Co-operation only reveals what human beings are capable of. Only by acting as species being, only by working in co-operation human beings are able to realise the human potential.

The relationship of individual and community and the conditions of co-operation have changed in the course of history. Life at the dawn of human development was very much based on co-operation. But in



that period the individual was not and could not be separated from his community, "each individual has no more torn himself off from the navel string of his tribe or community, than each bee has freed itself from connexion with the hive". And large-scale co-operation was based on slavery. Capitalism introduces again co-operation on a large scale after feudalism with its small-scale peasant production and independent handicrafts. But in capitalism social labour, production based on co-operation, presupposes the individual who has been separated from his community, who is not tied by bonds of blood or otherwise, but who is a free wage-labourer who sells his labour-power to capital.<sup>93</sup> This allows the capitalist to bargain with him as a seller of "individual, isolated labour-power". Only after buying he puts him together with many other isolated labourers, and profits from the increased productivity which their co-operation brings.

*"This co-operation begins only with the labour-process, but they have then ceased to belong to themselves... As co-operators, as members of a working organism, they are but special modes of existence of capital".<sup>94</sup>*

This is a further form of mystification in capitalism, because it looks as if the productive power of the co-operating workers is the productive power of capital. In earlier days Marx would have called this the alienation of the worker from his species being. The communist perspective would be that social production as it has been developed under capitalism would no longer be controlled by individual capitalists but planned and controlled by the associated producers themselves.<sup>95</sup>

In "Grundrisse" in the chapter on Money, Marx speaks about the *universal development* created by capitalism, be it again in an alienating way. In the course of human development the horizon of human beings has been widened till it became a world horizon embracing the whole of humankind. For a long time human beings have been living in communities with a narrow local and ethnic horizon. Their relations seemed to be more personal—and many people idealize the past for that reason—but Marx points out that these personal relations were not relations of free individuals but of personal dependence. Individuals related to each other "as feudal lord and vassal, landlord and serf, etc., or as members of an estate etc".<sup>96</sup>

Capitalism, based on free exchange in the market, has broken down these "ties of personal dependence, of distinctions of blood" and has established, it seems, the independent individual. Of course, they are dependent on each other, but in a new way. As private



persons, pursuing their private interests they are indifferent to each other. Their "social bond is expressed in exchange value" or "money".

*"The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket".<sup>97</sup>*

By basing mutual relations on exchange capitalism destroyed the barriers to world-wide expansion and was able to create the *world market*. Marx is full of praise for this revolutionary contribution of capitalism,<sup>98</sup> as it laid the foundations for the universal development of the human species. It created "a system of general social metabolism, of universal relations, of all-round needs and universal capacities".<sup>99</sup> It made individuals produce for society, for others, and exchange with others on a world-wide scale.

But that is not how individuals experience and live it under capitalism, because the new world-wide relations, the relations of the market rule over them as an alien power. They are not in control, they suffer from the consequences of the blindly operating market forces. They seem to be independent as compared to the people in earlier societies. But in fact they are only indifferent in relationship to others as they pursue their private purposes, whereas they are objectively dependent in a new way, not on persons, not on personal masters, but on structures, on anonymous relations of control. They can no longer name the one who rules them, but they are under control nevertheless.

*"Individuals are now ruled by abstractions, whereas earlier they depended on one another. The abstraction, or idea, however, is nothing more than the theoretical expression of those material relations which are their lord and master".<sup>100</sup>*

Today this rule of abstractions has become extremely powerful in the form of ever-expanding bureaucracy on the one hand and technocracy on the other hand. Bureaucrats and experts seem to rule the world with abstract formulas. Even the matters of war have been translated into abstract calculations of warheads and megadeaths.

Marx sees it as the task of socialist or communist society to master this universal expansion of relations brought about by capitalism. Universality is not a natural attribute inherent in individuals. The universal bond created by the world-market is a product of history. By nature the relations of individuals are much more limited. The historical expansion through universal exchange therefore produces first "the alienation of the individual from himself and others" while it also produces "the universality and the comprehensiveness of his relations and capacities"<sup>101</sup> It would be "ridiculous to yearn for a



return" to the unalienated, but less universally developed individual of the past. The point is that the alienated individuals move ahead and destroy the external relations of dependence, the rule of abstractions and replace them by social relations under their own common control. Then the universally developed individual will have come into being. Following the early stage of "relations of personal dependence" and the capitalist stage of "personal independence founded on objective dependence" in an universal setting, that would be the third stage of

*"free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their common, social productivity as their social wealth".*<sup>102</sup>

Earlier, in *German Ideology*, he expressed this more concretely. The communist revolution, based on the world-market created by capitalism, will bring the wealth of world-wide connections and production under control, so that the separate individuals will be able "to enjoy this all-sided production of the whole earth (the creations of man)".<sup>103</sup>

3. The *aesthetic-spiritual perspective* distinguishes the marxian anthropology from mechanical materialism on the one hand, and anti-humanistic asceticism on the other hand. Mechanical, reductionist materialism has no possibility to affirm human creativity in human relations, art, science and technology, play and phantasy in its own rights. Other-worldly asceticism denies human creativity in these fields in another way. Marxian anthropology places tremendous weight on consciousness as that what distinguishes the human species. As Engels put it in "Ludwig Feuerbach":

*"In nature—in so far as we ignore man's reaction upon nature—there are only blind, unconscious agencies acting upon one another... Nothing of all that happens... happens as a consciously desired aim. In the history of society, on the contrary, the actors are **all endowed with consciousness**, are men acting with **deliberation** or **passion**, working towards definite goals; nothing happens without a **conscious purpose**, without an intended aim.*<sup>104</sup>

Both the interaction with nature through labour as discussed in the dialectical-materialist perspective and the social interaction on an everwidening scale as discussed in the perspective of socialist humanism presuppose human beings as conscious beings.

Consciousness, as Marx said, is conscious being. As such it involves all the aspects of human nature. Sometimes we are inclined to reduce



consciousness to science and politics, to the conscious knowing of the laws of nature and to knowing one's place in the class struggle, eventually burying ourselves under books and newspapers. But of course, our conscious being relates not only and even not always primarily to the laws of nature, and to social and political developments, it relates also to what we feel and touch and hear and see in human relations, in play, in the creation or enjoyment of art, in other spiritual activities.

It is crucial for such "political animals" as we people on the left tend to be to realise the range of the all-sided development of the human potential of which Marx often spoke. In the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" he dealt most explicitly with the role of all the senses in the affirmation and emancipation of the human species.

*"Man appropriates his comprehensive essence in a comprehensive manner, that is to say, as a whole man. Each of his **human** relations—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting, acting, loving.... are in their **objective** orientation, or in their **orientation to the object**, the appropriation of the object, the appropriation of **human** reality".*<sup>105</sup>

In Hegel's idealistic spirituality all objectification is alienation—the objective world, the world of objects as something alien—, in Marx' *materialistic spirituality* objectification is the humanisation of the world. Through it the objective world becomes human reality, in which the human species feels at home, recognises and affirms itself in an ever growing unfolding of the richness of its essential powers.

Marx was the one who emphasized this cultural dimension of human life and activity as being present already in the basic life-activity of labour itself. It seems as if material production only serves the satisfaction of certain needs according to the standards of utility, but in the process we find the human species projecting, objectifying its essential powers. Thus industrial and scientific achievements are manifestations of the forces of human nature.<sup>106</sup>

This point has always been emphasized by the marxist tradition. However, Marx went beyond that. Though he did not work out a complete theory of art it is clear that he saw in free artistic production a culmination of the development of human potential. The *artistic dimension* is already present in human labour for particular needs: shaping materials according to one's imagination, enjoying the interplay of bodily and mental powers,<sup>107</sup> the experience of overcoming obstacles, the forming of objects not only according to standards of



utility but also of beauty. But it can fully blossom only in a sphere free of necessities, where human self-affirmation becomes an end in itself. Animals produce only for direct physical needs, "whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom". And the more they are free from such needs the more they will be able to form "objects in accordance with the laws of beauty".<sup>108</sup>

In "Capital" Marx speaks of the need for free time, not only for "intellectual development" and "social functions", but also for the "free-play of the labourers bodily and mental activity".<sup>109</sup> And he characterises the "true realm of freedom" as the sphere of "development of human energy," as "an end in itself"<sup>110</sup>

That a sense of beauty and the need of "free play" are essential aspects of human nature and crucial to full human emancipation are insights which some marxists have been inclined to ignore. Grey colours, uniform patterns, boring functions, lack of humour have been characteristic of official life in most socialist countries for a long time. Art has been subjected to more or less rigorous censorship by party bureaucrats. At its root lies a reductionist misunderstanding of historical materialism and a truncated view of human nature which is certainly against the spirit of Marx.

Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, a Spanish marxist living in Mexico since the Spanish Civil War, makes a strong plea for a re-thinking of marxist aesthetics on the basis of Marx' early work.<sup>111</sup> He shows that the usual marxist approach to art has been to produce a class-oriented sociology of art. The content and form of an artistic production would be analysed in the framework of class-contradictions, leading to a final verdict stating its progressive or reactionary character. Of course, as a marxist Vázquez has no quarrel with an analysis of the social conditions and ideological positions of a work of art. What he opposes is to reduce it to its ideological components ignoring its aesthetic value and the capacity of art to transcend social and historical limitations. Art is more durable than ideology. "Class ideologies come and go, but true art persists".<sup>112</sup> This transcending character of art prefigures the "universal human destiny" of the new society.<sup>113</sup>

Vazquez argues that Marxist aesthetics has to conceive of art "as a *form of cognition*" in its own rights, not only with its own forms, but also *with its own specific content*. The tendency has been to distinguish art only by its forms. Its object would be the same as that of science, namely reality, only its forms would be different. What



science and philosophy put in concepts art reflects in images. This is how Hegel looked at it, and many marxists have followed.

But this approach ignores that art has its specific object: *reality in relation to human life*, to the human subject. Science abstracts as much as possible from the subject, it tries to know the object in itself, without its relation to human subjectivity. Art does not deal with trees or human beings as science does. It does not reproduce botanical knowledge or political economy in other forms. It shows in concrete, individual manifestations of life something meaningful which can be communicated on a higher universal level. It does this neither through abstraction—the way of science—nor through copying or imitation, but by *creating a new reality*. “Art is knowledge only to the extent that it is creation”.<sup>114</sup>

Vazquez criticises in this way the narrow theories of “socialist realism” as developed under Stalin. Realism that is true to human reality has to be more than mere representation, it has to be transfiguration.

“*To transfigure is to place the figure on a human plane*”.<sup>115</sup>

Relating this to Marx’ vision of human self-realisation through the appropriation of the whole of reality we see how essential it is to acknowledge art in its own rights as something which cannot be substituted by science. Art affirms and expresses the human subjectivity in its relations to reality, something which science, especially the exact sciences cannot do.<sup>116</sup> It does so by affirming the human being not only as a thinking being but as a sensuous being. Ignoring this crucial function of art indicates the prevalence of a rationalist anthropology rather than a dialectical materialist perspective.

### c. *Militant humanism and common values*

Many of those who get involved in social and political struggles on the side of the oppressed masses do so primarily out of a humanistic ethical motivation. At the outset it is often not the scientific insight into the causes of exploitation but the sight of people suffering from injustice which moves people into action. Yet marxist theory seems to question the validity of ethical values including the concept of justice. Marxist agitators may speak of justice on public platforms. But in marxist theory the concept of justice is subjected to a critical analysis which brings out that it all depends who speaks of justice in what type of society. Justice means different things to different people. Tribals feel treated unjustly when their lands are taken away even if they get a fair compensation, because for them land is not a commodity. From the



point of view of capitalist society the question is only whether a fair price is paid. That is why Marx and Engels avoid to appeal to justice and the like when they call to get involved in the struggle. They point out the class-content of high sounding values. As Engels puts it:

*“As society has hitherto moved in class antagonisms, morality has always been class morality; it has either justified the domination and the interests of the ruling class, or ever since the oppressed class became powerful enough, it has represented its indignation against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed”.*<sup>117</sup>

Lenin expressed this very strongly when he defined morality in terms of the interests of the proletariat as that “what serves to destroy the exploiting society and to unite all the working people around the proletariat”<sup>118</sup>

Does this mean that there are no common values valid for all human beings across class divisions? Sometimes it sounds as if this is seen only as a future perspective, for example when Engels writes:

*“But we have not yet passed beyond class morality. A really human morality which stands above class antagonisms and above any recollections of them becomes possible only at a stage of society which has not only overcome class antagonisms but has even forgotten them in practical life”.*<sup>119</sup>

On the other hand, revolutionary movements with a marxist orientation do attract people across class barriers. What makes them ready to risk and even sacrifice their lives for others? And actually communist parties sometimes appeal to non-marxists to join the struggle against racism, fascism, imperialism, etc. on the basis of common humanistic values. Are they deviating from Marx when they do so, as Althusser assumes?

The young Marx himself started from a form of ethical humanism which he inherited from Feuerbach. Drawing his conclusions from Feuerbach's critique of religion he wrote by the end of 1843:

*“The criticism of religion ends with the teaching **that man is the highest being for man**, hence with the **categorical imperative to overthrow all relations** in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being”.*<sup>120</sup>

This is the language of humanism—“man the highest being for man”—and of ethics—the “categorical imperative” of the German philosopher Kant which means the imperative that applies to all.

Very soon Marx gave up this language and this approach. In



"German Ideology" he criticises as "ideology" the theories of those German thinkers who spoke of socialism and communism in terms of "humanism" and "liberation of man".<sup>121</sup> He broke with this idealistic humanism which made general moral demands the starting point of action for the change of society. He did not give up the "imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is debased", but from then onwards he wanted this imperative to be based not on humanistic ideals but on the processes of real history.

*"Communism is for us not a **state of affairs** which is to be established, an **ideal** to which reality (will) have to adjust itself. We call Communism the **real** movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the now existing premise"*<sup>122</sup>

Marx devoted the rest of his life-time to identify through scientific analysis the material, social basis for the historical realisation of this movement of emancipation, which otherwise would remain an illusory ethical demand. What are the forces in history which can bring about the overthrow of enslaving conditions, that becomes the leading question. The driving force behind this life-work of scientific analysis, the inspiration which guides its direction remains the vision of the emancipation of humankind from all enslavement.

But the materialist analysis leads to a reformulation in concrete terms of the enslavement of humankind and the struggle against it. It is not "man in general" who is enslaved, but a particular class, the proletariat, is enslaved by another class. That debases both, but in different ways. It is only the proletariat that suffers under it and therefore develops a consciousness of the need to overthrow these relations. And it is therefore in the proletariat that Marx identifies the material force which has the potential to overthrow the capitalist relations and thus to open the way not only to its own emancipation, but to the emancipation of all, as it has to do away with class-society. Because of its particular situation the proletariat has the chance to realise the dreams of the past, the old dreams of humankind, not through the preaching of ideals, but by taking up the struggle which results from the contradictions in capitalist society.

On the basis of his analysis Marx moves from an idealistic humanism to a materialist and militant humanism. He does not give up the imperative of human emancipation but he addresses it to the proletariat: "Working Men of all countries, unite!" This combination of materialist analysis and call for action has a highly ethical relevance though Marx would not call it that way. By analysing the sharpening



contradictions of capitalism Marx opened a historical perspective in which revolutionary action made sense. The *hope* arising from that perspective made it possible to overcome passivity which knows nothing but waiting for some benevolent people and institutions to alleviate the misery. This analysis made it possible for the workers to recognise themselves as actors and agents of their own emancipation. Without a perspective of hope there is no action. The imperative to unite and to fight, arising out of a new historical perspective, achieved on a mass basis what so many sermons and charitable activities did not achieve. It gave people their self-respect, their dignity. Workers living in horrible conditions, inclined to alcoholism to forget their misery, started finding new meaning in life, responding to this call in this perspective of hope. By joining trade-unions, organising strikes, supporting the party of the working class, educating themselves in evening classes, they got already involved in the process of self-emancipation. It is one of the great merits of Marx to have seen in the workers of his days not just pitiful paupers, but human beings able of emancipation.

The underlying critique of ethical idealism and utopian socialism is still relevant. The utopian socialists saw the proletariat suffering under injustice—and Marx appreciated the critique implied in this—but then they appealed to society at large to change. They saw the proletariat as a suffering class, but not as a class with “any historical initiative or any independent political movement”, as Marx puts it in the Communist Manifesto.

*“Hence, they reject all political, and especially all revolutionary action; they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means, and endeavour, by small experiments, necessarily doomed to failure, and by the force of example, to pave the way for the new social Gospel”*<sup>123</sup>

Whatever is done, is done *for* the suffering class, *not by* it. The same approach we find in so many activities all around today which intend to *uplift* the poor. Marx’s approach is different. He discovers in the proletariat not only the suffering class but also the struggling class. He is interested not in up-lifting it but in its *up-rising*. Socialism means for him not plans to care *for* the proletariat, but the result of the struggle of the proletariat itself.

Marx and Engels emphasized that the proletariat while fighting for its own emancipation was fighting for a classless society and thus for the emancipation of all humankind. In that sense the values of the struggle



for socialism or communism have a general—humanist—validity. But this assumption is not in a philosophical way based on the fact that the workers belong to the human race, but in a materialist way on their belonging to the working class. All human beings may have the potential for human development and emancipation. But not all are in a position to realise this potential on their own initiative. The ruling classes will not voluntarily give up their privileged position. Only some individuals may change over to the other side. But also the exploited masses are not equally in a position to come forward and lead the struggle. The working class because of its crucial position in capitalist society can take the historical initiative. They are poor but not marginal. They can paralyse capitalist production. Capitalist production cannot survive without their co-operation. Other people may be as poor and as alienated, they may be the poorest of the poor, hawkers, beggars, petty goondas, people belonging to what Marx called the *lumpen-proletariat*, but they are marginal even if they are many in numbers. They cannot take the lead in transforming society.

The practical consequences of the thesis that human beings exist in concrete social relations become visible. People in class society are not existing as “human beings” in general, but as workers or capitalists or intellectuals or beggars. Marx does not deny that there are some general characteristics of the human species. And marxist philosophers have clarified that marxism affirms the dignity and value of the concrete individual person. It also is possible to formulate common humanistic values in the face of the problems threatening the whole of humankind. That is certainly important. But it is not sufficient. Marx reminds us that the decisive question is how dehumanisation and denial of human dignity, how anti-human enslaving conditions can be overcome in practice. He poses the question of power, the *question of the capacity to ensure in practice what is professed*. It is one thing to declare untouchability to be inhuman. But it is the economic, social and political power of landlords, for example, which gives them the freedom to treat Harijans in an inhuman way. It requires a drastic change of structures to curb that power as the only way to make the norms of human dignity practically valid. Humanism in order to become practical has to be critical and militant.<sup>124</sup>

This militant humanism develops its own values within the framework of struggle. The struggle requires solidarity, selflessness, sacrifice. It helps people involved to overcome their narrow selfishness. Marx, Lenin and Mao all emphasized the *value of struggle* itself as the way in which the workers will transform, will revolutionize themselves, so as to get ready for their task in the new society. But the struggle has also



its negative effects. It necessarily demands to treat the class enemy as enemy. The question is how to see to it that the solidarity in the struggle against the enemy becomes all-inclusive after the battle is won, and how to prevent that the concentration of power to break the structures of inhumaness does not become a new structure of oppression. Later marxists have sometimes made use of Marx' critique of humanism as an ideology to justify an anti-humanist practice. All sorts of brutal and bureaucratic forms of debasing, enslaving and humiliating people have not only taken place but have been justified with such remarks as that revolutionary marxists have no time for humanistic sentimentality. What happened, especially under Stalin, or recently under Pol Pot, was that a new fetishism had replaced people at the heart of the historical process. The socialist State, the Party or the Revolution had become the central thing, as a fetish to be worshipped, apart from the concrete human beings, demanding human sacrifices. And this was justified ideologically either by a critique of humanist considerations as being "bourgeois" or—this also happened—by projecting a "humanism" which justified such sacrifices for the sake of "Man". On the other hand, the projection of common humanistic values in the period after Stalin could also serve to cover up concrete contradictions and conditions which humiliated and alienated people. In view of this it is important to reaffirm marxism as concrete, critical humanism, a socialist humanism based on critical analysis of the structures of society, including socialist society, and committed to a practical critique of all what cripples people and prevents them from becoming agents of their own emancipation.

d. *Some questions hundred years later*

It is a proof of the fertility of Marx' theory that his works are studied and used by people all over the world, not just for academic purposes but in search for an orientaton in today's world. As a historical materialist Marx would not be surprised that in the process also questions are raised which did not occur to him in that way more than hundred years ago or which arose on the basis of new historical developments. Three complexes may be mentioned in the present context. They centre around the questions of sexual exploitation, cultural identity, and death.

1. Socialist feminists have made us aware that Marxist theory has given very little attention to the role of *sexual division of labour* and sexual exploitation in the course of human history.<sup>125</sup> This is surprising as utopian socialists had already raised the issue. And Marx and Engels did not need to approach it from a moral angle. Marx historical



materialist analysis should have touched upon it as a focus, as it indeed did at the very beginning of his exposition of that perspective in "German Ideology". There Marx distinguishes three fundamental premises of human history: the production of the means to satisfy the basic needs, the creation of new needs and the propagation of the species. In connection with the third aspect of propagation Marx mentions "the relation between man and woman, parents and children, the family" which initially was "the only social relation" but in later history became subordinate to other social relations.<sup>126</sup> He goes on to say:

*"The production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a twofold relation: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relation—social in the sense that it denotes the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what extent"*<sup>127</sup>

Somehow Marx and Engels did not further analyse this fundamental natural-social relationship based on the sexual division and how the division of labour based on it became a structure of exploitation under patriarchy. Though "patriarchy" as a term is used by them, it has not been established as a category in the same way as "class" was established. The whole question of the bearing and rearing of children disappears behind the walls of privacy as if it would have no economic relevance.<sup>128</sup> Even Engels with his study on the origin of family only points out *when* the monogamous patriarchal family emerged, "but he did not attempt to answer the question 'how' it occurred and why women got dominated by men and why not the other way round".<sup>129</sup> He maintains that the economic base for oppression of women vanishes under capitalism while Marx acknowledges that even the workers in capitalist society have become slave dealers who sell wives and children.<sup>130</sup>

Some critics have pointed to a general tendency in Marx to ignore the biological dimension of human existence. But it would be possible to correct this within the framework of the Marxian anthropology. Such a correction on the theoretical level would have far-reaching consequences on the practical level. It would imply the recognition that male domination and exploitation of women is not only a product of the private property system, as Engels suggested. It has also to do with the violent domination which expresses itself in rape. Of course, it is only the physical sexual difference which is natural, while the use of the penis as a weapon, in warfare as well as in the family, is definitely social. Sexual violence played a main role in the establishment of



patriarchy and in its maintenance up to this very day. Patriarchalism preceded capitalism and feudalism which it underpinned. The marxist-oriented working class movement aims at the abolition of private capitalist property as the key to break down the whole exploitative system. This is indeed crucial for any advance to a socialist, free and egalitarian society. But there is no reason to assume that this in itself will automatically lead to the abolition of male domination in any sphere of life.

The experience of socialist countries shows that the question cannot be solved on the economic and legal level only. They have made impressive achievements in the legalisation of equal rights and in the encouragement of women to work outside homes. Women have achieved economic independence from their husbands and fathers. Yet equality remains elusive. In the higher echelons of society, where power is concentrated, women are heavily under-represented.<sup>131</sup> One of the main reasons seems to be that the structure of the family relationships has remained the same. Obviously marxist theory will have to take feminist studies of these and other problems regarding the male-female relationship very seriously in order to equip itself for a more comprehensive approach to this fundamental aspect of human emancipation.

2. In the previous chapter, it has been mentioned already that the question of national and *cultural identity* did not play much of a role for Marx. This can be turned into a question about his anthropological approach. Is there maybe something in Marx' concept of the human species which tends to foster an abstract sort of cosmopolitanism? What is it which makes people deeply concerned about their language and other elements of their cultural identity? These are urgent philosophical and political questions at the same time.

New Left marxists and independent Hungarian marxists of the Budapest school have raised questions about Marx' concept of *universalism*. Marx assumed that the history of human society tends both towards ever greater freedom and ever greater universality. He supposes that both go together and need each other. The widening of horizon, the tendency to become world-wide universal, is for Marx simultaneously a broadening of the scope for human freedom. Ultimately human beings can realise themselves as human beings only on the universal level, not as Germans or Jews, not as Tamils or Indians, but as members of the human race. The question is whether this universalism is sufficiently protected against uniformism. Marx with the optimism of the 19 century was fascinated by the world



market created by capitalism. For this he sings the praise of the bourgeoisie in the "Communist Manifesto":

*"The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country... We find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature".*<sup>132</sup>

Marx may have in mind mutual enrichment through universal exchange. But in the next passage he himself admits that there is no mutuality in the process: the bourgeoisie "creates a world after its own image". The global reach of the multinationals, the attempts to establish a universal civilisation of consumers of Coca Cola and the like, have impressed on us the shadow side of the world market and its universalism. Marx expected a world without borders and eventually with one language. But the world literature he saw emerging certainly was not meant to be that of "Reader's Digest" and "Time" magazine. Neither would he be satisfied with the world-wide distribution of the "Communist Manifesto" or the "Soviet Review". The struggles for national liberation have taught us that we need to develop our cultural identity in the quest for human emancipation. Of course, narrow-mindedness, cultural chauvinism is an obstacle to human emancipation. But the alternative is not an uniform, cosmopolitan universalism. As Iring Fetscher puts it: Socialists must learn "to transform humanist universalism into humanist pluralism. In nature, the ability of all species to resist and regenerate is founded on their wide diversity: in a similar way, the strength and vitality of mankind depends on the profusion of individual cultures and nations".<sup>133</sup>

3. Marx' final perspective is the "development of the rich individuality which is all-sided in its production as in its consumption".<sup>134</sup> The question arises what happens with all those individuals, with all those generations of human individuals who have died and will die before this vision of human fulfillment has come true. Some critics have noted, as in the case of the sexual question, a lack of interest in this other aspect of the natural conditions of human existence: the physical-biological limitation of death.<sup>135</sup>



Marx believes in the triumph of the species. He hopes that it will finally emerge from the horrors of history realising the full human potential. But does this not mean that human individuals are sacrificed to the progress of the species, and does this not eventually lead to a justification of exploitation and repression? This question can be substantiated with a reference to Marx' appreciation of the contribution of capitalism to human progress. It is capitalism which lays the material foundation for that development of the rich individuality, by raising the level of productivity, by creating new needs, by enforcing a new type of work discipline and "general industriousness" and by opening up the world market. Yet there is nobody who has made a more devastating criticism of the brutal, totally alienating, crippling effects of the capitalist mode of production on the workers, and of other de-humanising effects of its never-ending pursuit of profit-making.

Of course, Marx did not expect capitalism to last for so long, but that does not affect the basic question about those who die along the dirty roads of history. It applies also to the question of those who die in long revolutionary struggles. The species may advance thanks to their sacrifice, but they will not see it. Even more difficult is this with regard to those who don't give their lives but whose lives are taken all the same.

Returning to Marx' anthropology it appears that it has somewhat contradictory approaches which taken together however may help to prevent both cynical justifications of human sacrifice and a sentimental withdrawal from history.

On the one hand there is his view of the human essence being located not in the individuals but in the human species. Along that line he once comes even to an untypical and problematic use of the analogy with animal and plant kingdoms while reflecting on the price which individuals have to pay for the advance of the species. Defending Ricardo's "production for the sake of production" against Sismondi's sentimental concern for the welfare of the individual, Marx tells not to forget

*"that production for its own sake means nothing but the development of human productive forces, in other words the **development of the richness of human nature as an end in itself**".*

To oppose this would arrest the development of the species for the sake of the individual. With such considerations no war could be waged. But the main point is that the final outcome would justify the sacrifices:



*“although at first the development of the capacities of the **human** species takes place at the cost of the majority of human individuals and even classes, **in the end** it breaks through this contradiction and coincides with the development of the individual; the higher development of individuality is thus only achieved by a historical process during which individuals are sacrificed, for the interests of the species in the human kingdom, as in the animal and plant kingdoms, assert themselves always at the cost of the interests of individuals...”*<sup>136</sup>

This seems to be an ambiguous argument which in its isolated form could even bring Marx close to the logic of Social Darwinism which he and Engels otherwise rejected.

On the other hand Marx often and very outspokenly emphasizes the *concrete living individuals* as the decisive actors and judges. That is the other line of approach which we find especially in the time of “German Ideology” and the critical departure from the philosophical abstractions and generalities of the “true socialists”. His whole later critique of capitalism is exactly that it subordinates individuals to abstractions, and to the Moloch of Capital. Bourgeois society gives individuality to capital and denies it to living persons.

From this critique emerges that what happens to concrete individuals is exactly the humanistic standard by which Marx judges capitalism and qualifies communist society as the society in which “we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all”,<sup>137</sup> and in which it will be from each according to his ability to each according to his needs.<sup>138</sup>

Obviously Marx did not make death a point of theoretical reflection. We know from his biography how deeply he was moved by the death of his children and wife. But philosophically he seems to have settled the question at an early stage. With the ancient Greek philosophers whom he studied in his dissertation he took the finiteness of the individual as a natural phenomenon, while his whole outlook on life was based on a complete identification with the cause of humanity at large. Maybe it was his Jewish heritage that made him state as a student of 17 years old, writing on the Choice of a Profession, that “man’s nature is so constituted that he can attain his own perfection only by working for the perfection, for the good of his fellow men” which makes it possible to bring “sacrifices for the benefit of all”.<sup>139</sup>

This attitude of total identification with the larger cause, of living and dying for it, has been characteristic for many communists. It has brought



forth great examples of total commitment. The problem remains that "Nature" and "History" are indifferent towards concrete individuals, and it is crucial that those who identify themselves with the "Cause" never forget that the "Cause" is nothing apart from concrete individuals.

In short, while death is around all the way, we need affirmations of life, not only *in the end*, but right from the beginning as much as possible. One reason is that it becomes clear more and more that the high expectations of what communist society based on abundance will be able to achieve have to be sobered down. Maybe we will reach the point where communism becomes attractive merely as the only way of survival. All the more we need affirmations of life in the struggle against de-humanising conditions of mass-poverty, and threats of mass-destruction. The struggle itself is such an affirmation, but also festive celebrations, dance, music, art, play, love. One test-case for activists would be how they relate to children and old people. Marx himself practised some of these affirmations without waiting for the new society. But he did not reflect this personal practice in his theoretical framework.

### 3. Promethean Atheism

So far atheism has been one of the most unquestioned parts of the marxist world outlook. It has been a major obstacle for religious believers to join the ranks of marxist parties and marxist-led movements. Only in recent years some re-thinking and re-orientation has taken place in some communist parties (especially in Italy). In any case, however solidly atheism may be rooted in marxist tradition, it cannot be taken as an eternal dogma. Historical materialism analyses the historical material conditions under which ideas develop and find acceptance. This applies also to atheistic ideas.

Marx, Engels and Lenin articulated their atheism in various political and ideological contexts with different accents. Their critique of religion is formulated in generalising terms, but in fact they were drawing their conclusions about "religion" in the confrontation with particular expressions of religious thought and practice. Marx himself recognised this in the course of time, and moved from general statements on "religion" to the demand of concrete analysis of "religions" on a historical materialist basis. The young Marx assumed that the task of criticising religion had been completed at least in Germany. Almost one and a half century later religion is still very much alive in many parts of the world and marxists are facing the task of deeper and more concrete studies set by the older Marx. In that



connection the critique of religion of Marx, Engels and Lenin which has served as a framework and guideline for marxist studies needs to be analysed as well.

a. *Marx' critique of religion*

1. The militant humanism of the young Marx

*"For Germany the critique of religion is in the main complete and critique of religion is the premise of all critique"*

This is the opening sentence of Marx' most famous statement on religion which is contained in his "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction", written in 1843-44.<sup>140</sup>

Marx does not claim to be the first to criticise religion. He assumes—at this point of time—that others before him have already completed the basic task. Marx refers here to a number of critical attacks on religion—basically christianity—on historical and philosophical grounds which had dominated intellectual debates in Germany since 1835.<sup>141</sup> The culmination had come in Feuerbach's confrontation with the philosophy of Hegel and its synthesis of philosophy and religion. Marx himself does not enter any more into a theoretical discussion of these problems. He takes it for granted that philosophical and scientific enlightenment once for all has exposed religion as an illusionary human enterprise.

As far as we know he had never been an ardent religious believer—as the young Engels—and already before he developed the theory which is called by his name he professed his atheistic convictions. In the Foreword to his doctoral thesis about the "Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature" (1841), he declares that philosophy has to reject all gods for the sake of man. He chooses the figure of *Prometheus* from Greek mythology to make his point.

*"Philosophy makes no secret of it. The confession of Prometheus 'In simple words, I hate the pack of gods' is its own confession, its own aphorism against all heavenly and earthly gods who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity. It will have none other beside".<sup>142</sup>*

Prometheus had stolen the fire from the gods and brought it to humankind on earth and for this he was punished by Zeus, chained to a rock while an eagle tore at his liver. Marx concludes his Foreword with the line:

*"Prometheus is the most eminent saint and martyr in the*



*philosophical calendar*”.<sup>143</sup>

Only two years later, a famous print showed Marx as Prometheus bound, chained to a printing press and attacked by the Prussian eagle, after his “*Rheinisch Zeitung*” had been closed down.<sup>144</sup> In those days Marx was still a radical bourgeois democrat but soon he came to see rather the proletariat as the force which was called to become a new Prometheus.<sup>145</sup> In any case, Prometheus, though himself a mythological figure, stands for the militant humanism which the young Marx shares with some of the foremost thinkers of his time. He symbolises the emancipation of the human species carried forward by philosophical critique which had brought down not only the fire but the gods themselves from heaven.

The basic content of Feuerbach’s critique of religion is that all religion is an alienated self-expression of “man”. Whatever it may say about gods and heaven, in fact religion is nothing but human beings relating to their own fantastic projections. In the words of Marx:

*“Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again”*.<sup>146</sup>

Critique of religion reveals this human content of all speculations about the divine. It turns theology—theory about God—into anthropology—theory about “man”. It establishes that “man is the highest being for man”. With others Marx shared the conviction that religion does not allow human beings to come into their own. And thus he welcomed the critique of religion as an essential part of the liberation of humankind. It is for the sake of human emancipation that Marx is an atheist. The denial of all gods is meant to serve the affirmation of all that is human.

Going beyond Feuerbach Marx poses the question *why* human beings produce religion. What drives them into this alienation? He answers this by pointing at the condition of *class-divided society as the source of alienation*. It is not human nature in the abstract but human beings in society who express and loose themselves in religion.

*“Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, an inverted world-consciousness, because they are an inverted world”*.<sup>147</sup>

The fact that people need religion shows that something is wrong in society. Religion indicates misery and is a form of protest against it.

*“Religious distress is at the same time the **expression** of real*



distress and also the **protest** against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people".<sup>148</sup>

These famous words disclose that Marx has a deeper analysis of the phenomenon of religion than many vulgar agitators who speak of religion only as opium for the people, as a matter invented by malicious priests and rulers to fool the people. Marx recognises that more is involved. While religion has the function to sanction and justify existing conditions, it also serves as a consolation and complement for what is lacking, and thus as a form of protest. People's own aspirations and frustrations are also expressed in religion.

But all the same, it is an alienating and illusionary form of protest. It is like the opium which produces dreams which make people to forget their misery for a while but hinders them to fight the causes of their misery. The critique of religion is therefore the first step—here Marx even calls it the premise—in the struggle for the transformation of society. Marx is interested to move on to the next, more down-to-earth steps. Once religion has been unmasked as a holy form of alienation the following step is to "unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms".

*"Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics".*<sup>149</sup>

The recognition of human being as the highest being implies the obligation to fight for a society in which human beings are no longer enslaved and exploited. The purpose of atheism is not to win the debate about god and heaven, but to make the way free to win the battle for humankind.

*"The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that man is the highest being for man, hence with the categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being..."*<sup>150</sup>

Marx makes his remarks on religion in an "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law" in which Hegel deals with the state and society. Hegel saw the state as an embodiment of the Spirit in which human beings transcend their atomistic existence in civil society and realise themselves as part of the larger community. This view was all the more repulsive in the oppressive atmosphere of the authoritarian, Prussian state which presented itself as a "Christian State". This was, of course, a target for Marx' critique. First of all he criticised the use of



religion by the state for its own secular purposes: "For the Christian state... religion necessarily becomes a *means*; hence it is a hypocritical state".<sup>151</sup> This type of critique of the hypocritical use of religion—which betrays some sense of a different purpose of religion—can be found throughout the writings of Marx.

But Marx was not satisfied with the disappearance of state religion only, because for him even the secular state as created by the American and French Revolutions had still a religious dimension. Not only that religion continued to play a role in the private life of people, but their relationship to the state itself had an alienated and therefore religious character.<sup>152</sup> The citizens of the secular democratic state expect the state to realise the sovereignty of people and their essence as beings-in-community, while as atomised individuals in daily life in capitalist society they are cut off from each other and subject to the alien powers of the market and capital. Both the heaven of religion and the heaven of the state are illusionary realisations of the human essence. Both are forms of alienation and both are bound to disappear in the process of full human emancipation. In an emancipated society free of enslavement and exploitation people will no longer need the heaven of religious idols and illusions nor that of political idols and illusions.

Marx finds the roots of contemporary alienation in religion and politics in capitalist society. This society hinders human beings to become human-in-community, and that is why they seek the realisation of their human essence in the state if no longer in religion. In their daily real life, in the life of buying and selling and competing for survival they have to be egoistic and live as isolated atoms. This affects also the role of religion in secular society. In North America religion itself has become an egoistic, individualistic affair. What matters is no longer nature or nation or community but only the salvation of the individual soul.

The same happens in secular politics. The bourgeois revolution proclaimed the *human rights*. But they are conceived in an individualistic way, as "the rights of egoistic man, of man separated from other men and the community"<sup>153</sup> In capitalist society liberty and equality are based "not on the association of man with man" but on their separation. The right to private property is the fundamental right which "makes every man see in other men not the *realisation* of his own freedom, but the barrier to it".<sup>154</sup> The bourgeois revolution brought the freedom to be egoist, be it in religion or in business.

*'Man was not freed from religion, he received religious freedom.*



*He was not freed from property, he received freedom to own property; He was not freed from the egoism of business, he received freedom to engage in business".*<sup>155</sup>

The common religion of these isolated individuals in capitalist society, whatever their private religious beliefs and political idols, is the worship of Mammon. That is the last step of Marx' critique of religion in capitalist society. The common god of capitalist society is Money. Its worship is the culmination of alienation.

*"Money is the jealous god of Israel, in face of which no other god may exist. Money degrades all the gods of man and turns them into commodities. Money is the universal self-established value of all things. It has therefore robbed the whole world — both the world of man and nature — of its specific value. Money is the estranged essence of man's work and man's existence, and this alien essence dominates him, and he worships it".*<sup>156</sup>

We see that Marx' critique of religion goes much deeper than that of earlier and later bourgeois atheists—and many marxists as well—who consider religious superstition as the main problem and make it the main target of critique. He sees religion not simply as a phenomenon of ignorance and its manipulation but as the expression of deep-rooted processes of *alienation*. This alienation works itself out on various levels. It appears in religion proper but also in secular politics and in economic life. On all these levels people worship forces beyond them and subordinate their life to their domination, whether it is some god in heaven, some political idol or money. The most powerful form of alienation is no longer to be found in traditional religion but in the sway of Mammon which even has managed to commercialise the old religions as religious practices in North America show.<sup>157</sup> Human emancipation is the liberation from all these alien forces. To be successful it needs to tackle the root cause of alienation in society. The main task therefore is the struggle for the transformation of society.

Marx leaves no doubt that the practical critique of society, of the "vale of tears", is more fundamental than the theoretical critique of religion which is its product. But he is none the less firm in his conviction that religion and emancipation, *religion and human liberation are mutually exclusive*. Emancipation takes place as humankind overcomes all dualism and alienation. Religion is for Marx the summary and summit of alienation. In it human beings submit to self-produced alien powers. Emancipation is the re-absorption of those powers by human beings themselves. This emancipation has to be self-emancipation. Otherwise people would be dependent again. If



they would need an intermediary for their emancipation they would be again in the realm of religion.

*“Religion is precisely the recognition of man in a round-about way, through an intermediary”.*<sup>158</sup>

Christ, the state, money are intermediaries. As such they are obstacles to human self-recognition and self-emancipation. It is this concern for human independence and not questions of a materialist world outlook which is also at the heart of Marx' rejection of the idea of creation.

*A being only considers himself independent when he stands on his own feet; and he only stands on his own feet when he owes his existence to himself. A man who lives by the grace of another regards himself as a dependent being. But I live completely by the grace of another if I owe him not only the maintenance of my life, but if he has, moreover **created** my life—if he is the source of my life”.*<sup>159</sup>

Questions have to be asked about the concepts of grace, creation and mediation which Marx uses here. But it shows once more clearly that the thrust of the atheism of the young Marx is his humanism, his concern for human emancipation.

## 2. The materialist method of the mature Marx

Recent research has highlighted the shift in Marx' approach to the critique of religion in the course of the elaboration of his materialist conception of history.<sup>160</sup> In the early writings discussed above the critique of religion as completed by Feuerbach is taken as the premise and model of the critique of state and society. In “Capital” it is the other way around. There Marx indicates that a critical analysis of history and society is the premise and presupposition for a proper materialist critique of religion. In a footnote at the beginning of the chapter on machinery and modern industry Marx speaks of the need for a “critical history of technology” and comments on its importance for a materialist analysis of other aspects of society.

*“Technology discloses man's mode of dealing with Nature, the process of production by which he sustains his life, and thereby also lays bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and of the mental conceptions that flow from them. Every history of religion, even, that fails to take account of this material basis, is uncritical. It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion, than, conversely, it is, to develop from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialised forms of*



*those relations. The latter method is the only materialistic and therefore the only scientific one. The weak points in the abstract materialism of natural science, a materialism that excludes history and its process, are at once evident from the abstract and ideological conceptions of its spokesmen, whenever they venture beyond the bounds of their own speciality".*<sup>161</sup>

This is a significant methodological statement in which Marx seems to criticise the methodology of Feuerbach's critique of religion and implicitly also that of his own early writings. He distinguishes two types of critique of religion, the one that starts from above, from the "misty creations of religion" and establishes their "earthly core", and the other that starts from below, from the "actual relations of life" and develops from there a critical understanding and explanation of the corresponding heavenly forms. The first approach was indeed that of Feuerbach who started from religion and reduced it to anthropology. Such a critique is not really materialistic and therefore not really scientific, Marx says, because it does not proceed from the processes of change in the course of human history. It speaks in a time-less way about "religion" and "man" in general, instead of analysing the historical origin and the material conditions of the development of concrete religions. This implies that Marx no longer believes that the critique of religion is completed or that it would need only the effort of broad-casting its results. He rather formulates a demand for the critical materialist study of religions which in his days had scarcely begun.

This historical materialist approach of Marx implies that he is not interested in atheistic theories and propaganda but in concrete analysis of religious phenomena. That is why he disagrees with the approach of "*abstract materialism of natural science*" which may proclaim the non-existence of gods on abstract philosophical grounds but fails to explain the role of religions in history. Their abstract conceptions are therefore "ideological" and not scientific. This critical statement applies to a lot of anti-religious propaganda by later marxists.

Already in the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" of 1844, Marx had argued that atheism as the denial of unreal gods has no meaning for socialists. "Socialism is man's positive self-consciousness, no longer mediated through the abolition of religion".<sup>162</sup> Accordingly Marx resists later attempts of Bakunin and others to turn the First International into an organisation of militant atheists. He argued that the International has nothing to do with theology, suggesting that theoretical atheism is a negative form of theology, and opposed the



dictation of "atheism as a dogma" <sup>163</sup> Some readers even find traces of a deviation from atheism in an occasional reference to the "shrewd Spirit that continually manifests himself" in the contradictions of history. <sup>164</sup> That seems to be far-fetched in the light of other utterances in which Marx confirms his own atheistic convictions.

Though Marx did not go into deep systematic studies of the history of religion, there are several scattered references which indicate his later line of approach. In the famous section of "Capital" in which he uses the analogy of fetish-worship to explain the "mystical character of commodities", <sup>165</sup> he relates various types of religions to different forms and stages of social development, <sup>166</sup> showing that "the religious world is but the reflex of the real world". The earliest stage is that of the ancient social organisms of production with their narrow social relations and depending on nature.

*"This narrowness is reflected in the ancient worship of Nature, and in the other elements of the popular religions".* <sup>167</sup>

The latest and last stage in the history of religion Marx sees in "Christianity with its cultus of abstract man, more especially in its bourgeois developments, Protestantism, Deism, etc." as the "most fitting form of religion" for capitalist society. <sup>168</sup> This short reference is somewhat cryptic and difficult to interpret. Most probably it refers to the worship of Christ as the mediator <sup>169</sup> and as an abstract ideal which has lost all historical concreteness. This would correspond with the anonymous and abstract universalism of capitalist commodity production.

While he criticised christianity of his days on many accounts Marx spoke with respect about early christianity as a predominantly progressive movement and especially about Jesus as a historical figure. His daughter Eleanor relates in her memories how her father dispersed all doubts about an eventual religious meaning but told with great respect the story of the carpenter's son whom the rich had killed, and who had distinguished himself by his love for children. <sup>170</sup> Similarly Marx pays his respect to Luther whom he often quotes in "Capital" and "Theories of Surplus-Value". But obviously he does not expect that religion could once more play a positive role in his own time or in the future. At a lower level of social development it might sometimes have been the vehicle for progressive insights and actions. But that time has gone since enlightened thinking has understood that the religious world is but the reflex of the real world and it will be gone for all once the real world of material production is placed on a transparent basis and no mystification will be needed any more.



*"The religious reflex of the real world can, in any case, only then finally vanish, when the practical relations of every-day life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowmen and to Nature. The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan".<sup>171</sup>*

### 3. Some situation-bound assumptions of Marx?

Marx' materialist methodology and his concern for the emancipation of humankind in his critique of religion are of fundamental importance for a critical evaluation of the role of religion in human history. Religious believers have to ask themselves whether they are as radically committed to "overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being" and they have to confront what they believe to be the truth with a critical scientific analysis of the historical conditions under which these beliefs developed and came to be accepted.

But this applies also to Marx and his basic assumptions about religion which led him first to the conclusion that all religion is alienation and thus an obstacle to human emancipation and then to the lasting conviction that enlightenment and rational transformation of society will be the end of religion. Marx acknowledged that religion also can turn into protest against unjust conditions and accordingly he commented positively on certain religious movements and figures in history. And yet on the theoretical level he sticks to the thesis that religion and human emancipation cannot go together. The underlying assumptions of this stand are to be found in the contemporary conceptualisation of religion especially in the philosophy of Hegel and the corresponding forms of alienation in political and social life.

In Hegel's philosophy the Spirit is the subject which through a long process of alienation in nature and history finally comes to its full self-realisation in which everything else is absorbed. The political parallel of this relationship is the monarchical state—as Hegel's Prussia was—in which everything serves the monarch on the throne who represents all. The analogy in economic life is the accumulation of capital which results from the exploitation of all sorts of individual efforts. The gods of religion appear in the light of Hegel's Absolute Spirit, of the *monarchs* on their thrones and of *Mammon* as entities which can exist and grow only at the cost of human beings, by



exploiting them. Just like human emancipation requires the overthrow of capital that sucks living labour and of monarchs who repress whole nations, it also needs the overthrow of all deities that absorb human energies and aspirations and thus prevent humankind to come into its own.

Marx' remarks about creation show that he understands the god-humankind, creator-creation relationship as such an exploitative, repressive relationship. As long as a creator is supposed to be the source of my life, as long as I depend on his grace—as on the grace of some despot—I cannot stand on my own feet. The same Marx does not hesitate to recognise the human being as a needy being in his relationship to nature and to fellow human beings. He does not advocate the self-sufficiency of the individual. He knows of relationships of dependence which are not detrimental to human emancipation. If he sees the dependence on a creator-god as irreconcilable with human emancipation, then this is the result of a *particular concept of the god-human relationship* which was prevalent in his time. It is true that many religious practices are an obstacle to emancipation and therefore deserve to be criticised. But the history of religious beliefs and practices—which resists such generalisations—shows that the god-humankind and creator-creation relationship can be conceived also in non-antagonistic ways, in terms of giving of life, power and responsibility, and in categories of friendship and love. Religious beliefs can also be strong affirmations of the human, meant to encourage people to stand on their own feet. The existence of nature and human dependence on it does not imply that human beings are not meant to stand on their own feet, neither does the existence of God and the human relation to him according to religious beliefs necessarily imply such an assumption.

*b. Engels' critique of religion: science against ignorance*

A look through the writings of the young Engels soon reveals that he travelled a different road to atheism. He was born and grew up in the stifling pietistic atmosphere of Wuppertal, of which he has given some colourful descriptions in his "Letters from Wuppertal".<sup>172</sup> Especially his 1839 letters to his friends Wilhelm and Friedrich Graeber who studied theology document in detail a spiritual-intellectual struggle in which he tries to find new foundations for his religious convictions. He raises critical questions about the intellectual contradictions in orthodox pietism, about the doctrines of inspiration and predestination, etc., he finds a temporary solution in the modern theology of Schleiermacher, moves on to a sort of pantheism, and finally reaches



atheism. For Engels, this was not just a cool process of intellectual clarification, but a painful emotional struggle. "I pray daily, indeed nearly the whole day, for truth", he writes in one of his letters, "I have done so ever since I began to have doubts... I search for truth wherever I have hope of finding even a shadow of it and still I cannot acknowledge your truth as the eternal truth...I am moved to the core, but I feel I shall not be lost; I shall come to God, for whom my whole heart yearns".<sup>173</sup>

It would be worthwhile to analyse the spiritual journey which finally led him to atheism step by step. This cannot be done here. Obviously one of the driving motives in Engels' search for truth is the need for reasonable, rationally convincing answers to his doubts. "If there is a revealed religion, its God must indeed be greater but not different from the one who is shown by reason".<sup>174</sup> Religion may be based on feelings, as he considers for a while under the influence of Schleiermacher, but it should not contradict *reason* and the findings of science. He turns to Hegel in whose philosophy he finds the affirmation of reason and freedom which are most important to him. During his stay in Berlin, in army service, he gets involved with the Young Hegelians and comes to the conclusion that "all the basic principles of Christianity, and even of what has hitherto been called religion itself, have fallen before the inexorable criticism of reason".<sup>175</sup>

His keen interest in the philosophical critique of religion is documented in his lengthy articles against Schelling who in this period was lecturing in Berlin and was supposed to give a philosophical basis for the defense of faith.<sup>176</sup> Schelling introduced an irrational personal God whose freedom is arbitrary, whereas Engels following Hegel is convinced that only "that freedom is genuine which contains necessity, nay, which is only the truth, the reasonableness of necessity",<sup>177</sup> a thought which will guide him also in his later days.

Engels ends his refutation of Schelling with a vision of the new era which has dawned with Feuerbach's critique of christianity, with great pathos expressing a sense of liberation from a nightmare of doubts and confusion. "All confusion, all fear, all division has vanished. The world is again a whole, independent and free". And man stands there "free and strong". He has found after long searching "the holy thing" which deserves true religious devotion: "the self-consciousness of mankind".<sup>178</sup>

Engels paid attention to the different ways in which the young socialist movements in various countries related to religion. His sympathy is with the anti-religious propaganda of the English Socialists,<sup>179</sup> and he is unhappy about the surprising phenomenon



that the French Communists in that country of strong atheist traditions claim that "Christianity is Communism". Though Engels admits that there are elements in the doctrines of Christ and in early christianity which could support such a claim, he strongly rejects this identification, because the "general spirit of its doctrines is, nevertheless, totally opposed to it, as well as to every rational measure".<sup>180</sup> Similarly he recognises that Thomas Muenzer while sharing "the religious and superstitious nonsense of the age" derived some of his progressive principles from the Bible.<sup>181</sup> In his later writings Engels would continue to recognise the progressive character of early christianity and the peasant movement led by Muenzer, and at the same time insist that basically their religious frameworks were a matter of ignorance and superstition.

Engels' interest in the *propagation of atheism* was the main cause that the first encounter between him and Marx in 1842 did not yet result in close co-operation. As Engels recalled in 1895, Marx "opposed the idea that the *Rheinische Zeitung* should be chiefly a vehicle of *theological* propaganda, atheism, etc. instead of one of political discussion and action".<sup>182</sup> It was his "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy" which gained the confidence of Marx one year later. Even then Engels pursued with passion his campaigns against religion with a different emphasis. He shares the common conviction that "religion by its very essence drains man and nature of substance, and transfers this substance to the phantom of an other-worldly God" who at best in his grace may give some substance back.<sup>183</sup> But his emphasis is less on the process and causes of alienation and on the aspirations which express themselves in an alienated form—the "heart of a heartless world"—and more on the untruth, the lying, the hypocrisy of religion.

*"We want to sweep away everything that claims to be supernatural and superhuman, and thereby get rid of untruthfulness, for the root of all untruth and lying is the pretension of the human and natural to be superhuman and supernatural. For that reason we have once and for all declared war on religion and religious ideas..."*<sup>184</sup>

We cannot follow step by step Engels' further studies of religion and theology and comment on it. It appears that he was interested to strengthen his critique of "religious humbug" with findings from historical studies.<sup>185</sup> He came to agree with Marx that one should not impose atheism as a "compulsory dogma", using the argument that atheism was winning the day among workers anyway—"they are simply through with God"—and that persecution of religious belief



would strengthen the latter.<sup>186</sup> He continued to be interested in the historical critique of Biblical writings and orthodox christian doctrines.<sup>187</sup>

However, Engels' main concern with regard to the critique of religion is to utilise the insights of modern sciences to establish the foundations of a solid atheistic world outlook. His very influential writings, "Anti-Duehring" and "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy", have made a decisive contribution in forming a materialistic and atheistic world outlook among large sections of the working class movement.

Engels opposed Duehring's proposition to prohibit religion, arguing—like Marx—that religion will die its natural death once the transformation of society overcomes the need for religion. He summarises his understanding of the critique of religion in a rather sweeping way. "All religion... is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life", be it forces of nature or social forces. The "urge to personify" forces of nature "created gods everywhere" And the origin of monotheism is explained as the transfer of "all the natural and social attributes of the numerous gods" to "one almighty god, who is but a reflection of the abstract man".<sup>188</sup> Consequently Engels is convinced that scientific enlightenment about the forces of nature will eliminate religion.

*"Only real knowledge of the forces of nature ejects the gods or God from one position after the other... This process has now advanced so far that theoretically it may be considered concluded".*<sup>189</sup>

For Marx critique of religion was primarily linked with his humanism, with the categorical imperative to overthrow all enslaving and alienating conditions. For Engels it is primarily part of the philosophical and scientific struggle to overcome ignorance. Marx approaches religion in the framework of historical materialism, trying to analyse the concrete historical roots and perspectives of its various forms. Engels also participates in that effort,<sup>190</sup> but beyond or prior to that he is interested in the development of materialism as a philosophical world outlook, as the final means to prevent the return of religion.

In his "Feuerbach" essay he sees religion at the origin of idealism and both together as the products of ignorance which will be overcome by the advance of science and materialist philosophy. The idealist approach to the basic question of all philosophy, the question of relation of thinking and being, originates according to Engels in the primitive assumption that thinking and sensation were the activities of



a distinct, immortal soul. He notes with emphasis that the idea of immortality was not a product of alienation but of ignorance.

*“Not religious desire for consolation, but the quandary arising from the common universal ignorance of what to do with this soul, once its existence had been accepted, after the death of the body, led in a general way to the tedious notion of personal immortality”.*<sup>191</sup>

After mentioning that the gods were in a similar way the product of personification of natural forces he concludes:

*“Thus the question of the relation of thinking to being, the relation of the spirit to nature—the paramount question of the whole of philosophy—has, no less than all religion, its roots in the narrow-minded and ignorant notions of savagery”.*<sup>192</sup>

The church posed that question according to Engels in the following form:

*“Did God create the world or has the world been in existence eternally?”*<sup>193</sup>

Answering the question philosophy is split in the two camps of materialism and idealism, giving either primacy to nature over spirit or to spirit over nature. Religion with its assumptions of creation belongs to the camp of idealism, and with that conclusion the question of religion is settled for Engels.

Within his framework Engels must find it puzzling indeed that there are still “numerous natural scientists who are inexorable materialists within their science but outside it are not merely idealists, but even pious and, indeed orthodox Christians”.<sup>194</sup> He ascribes this to the influence of the idealist tradition. But this phenomenon rather reveals that for many believers religion does not compete with science in giving cause-effect explanations of reality. As scientists they share the “methodological atheism” of all science, by excluding “god” as factor in their search for causes. As human beings they share a religious commitment with others who see the whole of life and the totality of reality—whether scientifically explained or not—in relationship to God. And philosophically speaking they may not reckon themselves to the camp of idealism at all. The affirmation of the world as creation and of human beings as part of it is full of materialistic implications. All this throws up a number of questions which Engels did not consider.

### c. Critique of religion following Marx and Engels

The marxist critique of religion after the death of the founder-



fathers has been shaped mainly by the early slogan of religion as opiate of the people and the later science-derived arguments of Engels. Very few attempts were made to study more concretely religious traditions and practices in a historical-materialist way as the older Marx demanded. The dominant influence of Lenin and other Russian marxists on the further development of marxist theory did not contribute to a deepening of the marxist critique of religion.

Atheism was not an invention of the *Russian marxists*. For Lenin and his comrades the critique of religion had been completed by previous generations of the Russian intelligentsia. Belinsky, Herzen and especially Cherneshevsky, who had learnt from Feuerbach and others in the 40s and 60s of the nineteenth century, had established a firm atheistic tradition among Russian revolutionaries. The reactionary role of the Orthodox Church as one of the pillars of the Tsarist regime confirmed them in the conviction that religion did not require further study. The challenge of some intellectuals as Berdyayev and Bulgakov who re-opened the religious question went unheeded in the political turmoil and ideological battles of the early 20th century. In "Materialism and Empirio-criticism", Lenin strives to reorganise and reinforce the defense of materialism against all forms of idealism and fideism which even try to make use of natural sciences. Whatever the latest developments of science the fact remains,

*"that man and nature exist only in time and space, and that beings outside time and space, as invented by the priests and maintained by the imagination of the ignorant and downtrodden mass of humanity, are disordered fantasies, the artifices of philosophical idealism, rotten products of a rotten social system"*.<sup>195</sup>

Lenin's indignation and militant atheism has to be understood in the context of the revolutionary struggle in Tsarist Russia. But his statements on religion, though reprinted and repeated millions of times, could not be the final word. The rotten social system was overthrown, religion was deprived of its privileged position. The communists did not always patiently wait for it to die out according to the assumption of marxist theory. They exercised heavy pressure, sometimes even persecuted religious people and organisations, and yet it is still there sixty-five years after the revolution. Scientific education in the schools, cosmonauts returning from space flights with the announcement that they didn't see any god out there, a rather religion-free social environment did not produce the expected results. Among people who have grown up in a post-revolutionary society religious ideas still exercise some attraction as party officials admit.



How to explain this? It could be simply a reminder of the tenacity of religious traditions. Or the fault could lie in the lack of sophistication of atheistic education and propaganda. It also could be an indication that the new society is not yet free of alienating conditions. Ruling communist parties would find it difficult to acknowledge the last point. They rather opt for attempts to improve the quality and intensity of atheistic propaganda without changing the basic lines of argument. At the same time more serious studies are made about religions in their concrete historical forms. This could become a response to the demand of the older Marx, and this could lead to the insight that the general doctrines of religion as opiate and ignorance cannot be maintained.

Some marxist thinkers have gone deeper into the analysis of the *religious heritage of humankind*. They refuse to characterise religion only as opiate or ignorance. They try to evaluate concretely positive and negative aspects and stress the point that in religious forms humankind has posed fundamental questions about human existence which an optimistic rationalistic Enlightenment and marxism based on it tended to ignore or dismiss.

The Czech marxist Gardavsky who was teaching philosophy at a military academy published in 1967 in Prague a book under the title "God is not yet dead".<sup>196</sup> His reflections on Jacob, Jesus, Augustin, Thomas, Pascal leave the superficial critique of religion far behind and contribute through a deeper understanding of some of the basic concerns expressed in religion to a marxist-atheistic humanism. Another Czech philosopher Milan Machovec wrote a book "Jesus for Atheists" and entered into a deep dialogue with contemporary theologians. Against this background he has taken up neglected questions such as that of the "meaning of life". These open-minded critical marxist thinkers re-affirm the atheism of marxism on a new, humanistic basis. They assume that religion poses authentic questions but that its answers with reference to a transcendent God are illusory. They renew the humanistic marxist faith that humankind has to create its own future. It has to transcend itself without the help of a transcendent God. At one point, however, they come much closer than Marx and Engels to an understanding of the concept of *transcendence* as it is contained in religious traditions.

The latter used to speak in a sarcastic, angry manner about those who had criticised religion but still continued to speak of universal *love* in religious tones. Engels sees Feuerbach's idealism appear where he conceives sex, love, friendship, compassion, self-sacrifice, etc., as the



new true religion instead of accepting them for what they are, "mutual relations based on reciprocal inclinations between human beings".<sup>197</sup> He fears in this religious love-talk the danger of undermining the class-struggle.

*"But love! — yes with Feuerbach love is everywhere and at all times the wonder-working god who should help to surmount all difficulties of practical life—and at that in a society which is split into classes with diametrically opposite interests. At this point the last relic of its revolutionary character disappears from his philosophy, leaving only the old cant: love one another—fall into each other's arms regardless of distinctions of sex or estate—a universal orgy of reconciliation".*<sup>198</sup>

Engels is delighted to discover in the apocalyptic book of the Revelation of John, the last book of the Bible, a testimony that early christianity as the religion of oppressed and persecuted people not always had been a "religion of love", of "love your enemies"

*"Here undiluted revenge is preached, sound honest revenge on the persecutors of the christians... It is the natural feeling, free of all hypocrisy, that a fight is going on..."*<sup>199</sup>

Obviously Engels concern is to fight a type of love-ethics that undermines the will to struggle. He has in mind the petty bourgeois sentimentalities of people who think that they can solve the gigantic social problems by being nice to their neighbours, doling out to the poor and keeping quiet about exploitation. And he is certainly right that religious preaching has encouraged such attitudes and thus has served tremendously the interests of the ruling classes. Marx had the same in mind when he wrote in his early days a devastating comment on the social principles of Christianity which failed to bring about any meaningful change.

*"The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submissiveness and humbleness, in short, all the qualities of the rabble, and the proletariat, which will not permit itself to be treated as rabble, needs its courage, its self-confidence, its pride and its sense of independence, even more than its bread".*<sup>200</sup>

Marx asserts that the proletariat needs moral qualities—even more than bread but not those fostered by religion. Till today a particular type of atheistic propaganda follows this line by saying that religion has a negative dehumanising impact on the moral formation and development of people. It hinders the free development of the human personality and its relationships it is claimed. A lot of evidence is there



to confirm this view. On the other hand, there are also official statements to the effect that what unites marxists and christians are humanistic ideals and values.

Here appears a contradiction. From the theory of religion as life-negating illusion and ignorance follows that religious morality must necessarily be dehumanising. In practical life, however, it turns out that there are believers who seem to be quite human, who make a sincere positive contribution to the construction of socialism, who play an active role in the peace movements all over the world, and even some who join revolutionary organisations and struggles. This forces historical materialists to have a second look at their generalised assumptions about religion. Marx and Engels had based their statements on the observation of the practical function of christian morality. Militant revolutionaries like Fidel Castro and Che Guevara have come to a new assessment on the basis of new historical experiences. They know that love needs not be sentimental, but can be revolutionary, and is at work in the revolution. *Che Guevara* states, as Marx, that more than bread is needed.

*"The important question is not how many pounds of meat one can eat,... but that the individual be more fully realised, with a greater inner richness and a much greater sense of responsibility... Let me tell you, at the risk of looking ridiculous, that a true revolutionary is led by great feelings of love".*<sup>201</sup>

Che Guevara feels ridiculous because he is up against that strong tradition which thought of love as something sentimental, anti-revolutionary.

The marxist thinkers who have gone deeper into an analysis of the religious heritage have found that it is exactly at this point that socialist humanism has not to dismiss but to inherit in a secular form what previous generations have expressed in religious ways. *Gardavsky* sees in love the capacity of self-transcendence. That is how he interprets Jesus and the resurrection from death. Love overcomes the fear of death, it is ready to live and die for others. In that way the human being can do miracles. A similar concept of transcendence within human practice has been developed by Roger Garaudy.<sup>202</sup>

This all may sound strange in the ears of those who either have never seriously gone into the questions raised by religion or who are busy to get rid of the negative hang-overs of their own religious past. They may be satisfied with the traditional arguments of atheistic propaganda. Fortunately *marxists in India* are also moving beyond



that stage. M.N. Roy had made his sweeping statements against the whole of the spiritual traditions of India, not only in his earlier marxist days but also in his later days as a radical humanist. Others have followed.

But there also has been an intensification of the study of Indian history and of the role of religion in it. Kosambi and others have contributed to a historical materialist analysis of the social conditions under which various religious developments took place.<sup>203</sup> Deviprasad Chattopadhyaya has refuted the assumption that the whole of Indian philosophical tradition is committed to idealistic positions. He has interpreted the history of philosophical and religious thought in the framework of materialism versus idealism, and he answers the question "what is living and what is dead in Indian philosophy" by tracing and welcoming all that points in the direction of secularism, rationalism and science-orientation on the one hand and rejecting all that is opposed to that.<sup>204</sup>

K. Damodaran's study "Man and Society in Indian Philosophy" achieves a deeper understanding of religious values and questions. He does not dismiss the materialism-idealism framework altogether, but he quietly refuses to restrict his evaluation of the religious and philosophical quest to a judgement regarding its belonging to one of the two camps. His approach is that of the historical materialist who analyses the social conditions of the rise and decline of religious movements. Within that framework he shows a great sensibility for the deeper aspirations of people in their spiritual quest. Thus he comments on the moral and spiritual crisis in the period of the dissolution of pastoral tribal organisation of the early Aryans which led from the old vedic religion to the upanishadic philosophers:

*"It is true that the economic changes accompanying the varna system provided the people with more material comforts than before. But man does not live by bread alone. He is not satisfied merely with the fulfilment of his animal material needs for physiological survival. He wants to satisfy what Eric Fromm terms as the trans-survival and trans-utilitarian needs like love, company, compassion, justice and reason. He needs all the expressions of a meaningful human existence. He needs them as much as food itself".*<sup>205</sup>

Damodaran comments critically that the early philosophers failed to see the creative role of man in changing nature and society, but he appreciates nevertheless that they expressed the "urge in man to transcend the world of imperfection and unfulfilment, his unquenchable thirst for freedom, light and eternity".<sup>206</sup>



Whether some philosophy belongs to the materialist camp is not sufficient for Damodaran, who seems to have imbibed the spirit of Marx' Theses on Feuerbach. Thus he expresses critical reservations about the Lokayatikas as compared to Buddhism:

*"Unlike crude mechanical materialism resting on hedonism, buddhism was a dynamic philosophy with a humanistic content. To the Buddha there was nothing higher and nobler than man. He advised his followers to go to the people and tirelessly work for the good of the many, to take compassion to the world!"*<sup>207</sup>

He appreciates the contribution of ancient materialism to the liberation from the irrationalism and superstitions of brahminism but regrets its crude, vulgar, mechanical, unscientific approach which reduced all mental and spiritual phenomena to matter instead of seeing them as a product of the social existence of man.<sup>208</sup>

He is critical of religion and philosophy which made "god the substance and man the attribute", as it happened in the middle ages,<sup>209</sup> but he opposes the view that all religion and idealistic philosophy in India had been life and world-negating.

*"Even the idealist thought in India has not always been one of life-negation and withdrawal. There have been times when idealism and religious beliefs assumed an active role of life affirmation"*<sup>210</sup>

On the basis of his historical studies he concludes:

*"To say that religion in all its forms and under all circumstances has been and is weapon in the hands of reactionary classes to belittle man and insult his dignity is not only unscientific but contrary to historical reality"*<sup>211</sup>

The religious awakening that culminated in the bhakti-movement, for example, "played a positive life-affirming role in Indian history"<sup>212</sup>

Thus Damodaran belongs to the marxists who plead to incorporate what has been part of the religious quest on a humanistic basis in the struggle for socialism.

*"It is a struggle to restore the harmony between the outward and inward being of man, to unfold the real human nature which strives for co-operation, love and compassion, for humane relations between man and man. It is a struggle to develop human personality through the transformation of social and political conditions and to fulfil man's need to be a **whole** man, his need for universality expressed naively and abstractly in the upanishadic concept of tattvam asi (thou art that)."*<sup>213</sup>



d. *The open question*

Often people ask me how I can use marxist theory, introduce and recommend it to others and support marxist-inspired movements and struggles and still continue to be a christian, read the Bible and be a church-member. This question applies to a growing number of christians all over the world. Similar questions can be posed to believing Hindus and Muslims who have taken to marxist theory and practice. In the eyes of most marxists and believers marxism and religion cannot go together and any attempt to relate to both of them at the same time is for them a sign of confusion and inconsistency, if not of a sinister plot.

It may be appropriate at the end of an "Introduction to Marxism" written by a marxist oriented theologian to make some remarks on this problem. As a christian I will limit myself to the relationship of *marxism and christian faith*. But I don't imply—as some christian theologians are inclined to do—that only christian religion properly understood would have this possibility of affirming certain basic tenets of marxist theory. My knowledge of other religions is too superficial to make any statements about them in this respect.<sup>214</sup>

However disturbing it may be for many christians as well as marxists, faith in God as I understand it in the Bible and in the practice of struggle against capitalism does not at all imply a rejection of materialism and humanism. The biblical creation-narratives are very much close to Marx' dialectical materialist anthropology. There is "Adam", humankind, as part of nature, taken from the "adamah", from the soil, and meant to work on it and rule over it. There is no need for a Prometheus to steal the fire from jealous gods. Power to rule, freedom for technological and cultural development is seen as part of what has been given to the human species in creation. Using nature humankind adds stature to itself not "in spite of the Bible",<sup>215</sup> but in accordance with it. The conflict in the creation-narrative is about the knowledge of "evil" not about the knowledge of nature. The difference with the Marxian anthropology is, of course, that human beings are not only understood as natural beings, as part of nature, and as social beings—male and female—but at the same time as beings made in the "image of God". However, this means not, as many believers and marxists assume, an immortal and divine soul, as something which links human beings with a heavenly world. It means a qualification of the human species as human in distinction of the animal species. All other species are created according to their kinds, determined by their biological distinctions. The human species is as



natural as all other species, but it is universal in its relationship to nature as Marx would say. It is not defined by sex or race, but by its role as God's representative in the cosmos.<sup>216</sup>

Similarly I find myself as one who listens to the Bible compelled to affirm Marx' categorical imperative to overthrow all relations that enslave humankind. Even before it articulated its faith in God as Creator Israel spoke of its God as the One who is totally opposed to Pharaonic systems of slavery. Exodus from slavery as a historical event is at the core of its faith. This has become part of christian faith through Jesus of Nazareth who radically affirmed God's opposition to all enslavement of humankind. The difference with the Marxian outlook is again that this biblical humanism finds its source in the relationship to God and not in the rejection of any relationship to God.

Many christians may add that a basic difference lies in the point that Marxism finds the power of evil rather in enslaving relations, whereas the Bible locates it in human beings themselves. It is true that marxism traditionally tends to underestimate the corruptibility of human beings. The unrealistic hopes that the change of structures alone would solve all basic problems have been belied by post-revolutionary experiences. And there are marxist philosophers such as Ernst Bloch who have gone deeper into this problem. However, the usual approach to sin on the christian side needs also correction. It is often used in a fatalistic way as an excuse for not trying to change structures, or even as a justification of capitalism which speculates on the egoism of human beings. This is actually diametrically opposed to the thrust of the biblical exposure of human sinfulness which leads towards fighting it, both in ourselves and in structures. By calling evil systems and practices "sin" people are made responsible for it and thus obliged to fight it. And its realistic insight in human inclinations towards anti-human practices would rather support the search for structures which are not conducive to such inclinations and helpful to contain or curb them.

The problem of the above argument is that this view of biblical faith is belied by a lot of religious practice. I am deeply aware of many, many horrifying instances of repressive and exploitative ideologies, policies and patterns carried on and justified in the name of God and Jesus Christ. A concrete marxist critique of religion is needed to expose and fight that. It should show when and where religious beliefs and practices have been and continue to be detrimental to human emancipation. What keeps me away from the conclusion that I have to become an atheist to join in that effort is that the prophets and Jesus



have uttered such critique long before, not in spite of their faith in God but because of it. That makes it impossible for me to accept a generalised atheistic dogma which assumes for all times and all places that any faith relationship to God necessarily must be harmful to human freedom. It can be a source of freedom as well.

At this point a historical materialist analysis of the concrete contexts in which religion and atheism emerge and function may be of use. We cannot speak of religion or atheism in general. Religions are born in history, they grow in particular places under particular circumstances, and they fulfill various functions in different contexts. The same is true for atheism. The denial of god takes different forms and plays various roles, depending on who are doing so, where and why.

In history religion has not only served the rulers with the legitimation of their power but also the oppressed and rising classes with the possibility of critique and protest. This has been recognised by marxists with reference to early buddhism, early christianity, early Islam, Reformation, etc. In this connection it is important to note that the same religious movement in the course of history can change its function. It can move from an emancipatory role to a domesticating repressive role, and back again. Protestantism was associated with the rising social forces of capitalism and played an emancipatory role in the breaking of feudal fetters. But Catholicism which was very much part of the old feudal order did not die with feudalism. Today some of the most radical christian groups in Southern Europe and Latin America have a Catholic background, while Fundamentalistic protestant preachers are invited by military juntas, supported by the Reagan administrations to break the revolutionary influence of the catholic "basic communities" which are inspired by a theology of liberation.

*Modern atheism* developed in the context of the bourgeois revolution. It has various aspects. One of the slogans of the French Revolution was "ni dieu ni maitre", neither god nor master. This slogan was directed against a religion which legitimised the hierarchical order of feudalism. The "Rights of Man" were proclaimed instead of the divine rights of the kings, and it was assumed that the promotion of the "rights of man" required an atheistic stand. This was reinforced by the advance of the natural sciences which demolished the medieval understanding of the cosmos, leading as especially the French materialists assumed to a scientifically established atheism. Finally there was bourgeois atheism in its most specific form, namely in the emancipation of economic life from religious and moral control and critique. The "laws of the market" and the maxime "business is



business” denied all traditional religious claims to have a say on the conduct of economic affairs.

Against this expulsion of religion from science, politics and economics churches were initially inclined to defend the old feudal forces and values. But slowly an accommodation took place. Once in power the bourgeoisie became less militant in its atheism. Soon it sought the support of religious forces in the confrontation with the rising working class. The religious institutions started adapting to the privatisation of religion—as something for the soul only—and were inclined to join in preventing further revolutionary upheavals. Bourgeoisie and religion entered into an anti-socialist alliance. This evolving alliance drove those who aimed at the transformation of bourgeois society towards an anti-religious position. The first generation of (utopian) socialists and communists had appealed to religion in its critique of — bourgeois atheistic — capitalism. This was especially so in France where bourgeois atheism had been most explicit. But from Marx and Engels onwards critique of religion and atheism became again the companion of emancipation and revolution. However, in the anti-imperialist struggles of colonized people of the Third World, protest and revolution once more expressed themselves in religious forms also. Present-day Latin America is especially interesting in this respect. The breaking down of the alliance between feudal and bourgeois forces and people’s religion which has started to support revolutionary forces, the birth of liberation theology in this context, has liberated also sections of Christians elsewhere from their ideological captivity in the bourgeois world.

The combination of Marxism and atheism, as it got accepted by the working class movement in Europe was the result of the historical constellation in which the forces of emancipation found religion on the other side of the barricades. But that does not prove as a matter of eternal truth that religious belief must always be anti-emancipatory. Nor does it prove that atheism is always liberating.

Things are more complicated as the case of *bourgeois atheism* indicates. The proclamation of “human rights” against the divine legitimation of feudalism and absolutism was certainly a step forward on the road of emancipation. But the emancipation of the economy from feudal fetters, though welcomed by Marx because of its revolutionising effects, brought the all-embracing rule of capital and the fetishism of commodities and money. Marx analysed the human alienation under capital in religious terms, but by doing that, whether he liked it or not, he joined with many religious voices which have



condemned Mammonism before him. They however, the prophets and Jesus for example, reject Mammon in the name of their God as the one who is opposed to its injustice. "You cannot serve God and Mammon".<sup>217</sup>

Even with regard to science things are not so simple, as critical marxists have pointed out.<sup>218</sup> The bourgeois Enlightenment of the 18th century had overthrown God and the king and placed "Reason" on the throne. Reason would liberate man through science and technology. Anything beyond reason, scientific explanation and technical rationalisation should go. This type of *scientific rationality*, however, has meanwhile come to serve most destructive purposes and "gods", as the history of science and technology shows. Scientific rationality analyses causal relations. It cannot set the wider aims for human action, such as emancipation towards a society based on solidarity. If it is allowed or forced to do so, the aim becomes indeed nothing but the expansion of the productive forces, and the solidarity of the working class may be instrumentalised for that purpose only. Socialist technocracy would create a new fetishism.

Marx himself went beyond the superficial bourgeois rationalism of the Enlightenment. His historical materialism does not start from "reason" but from real human beings in their interaction with nature. They are not only defined and determined by scientific and technical rationality. Their needs for social interaction, art, friendship, etc., involve other forms of human experience and knowledge. And yet, it seems, marxist theory has not escaped from an unbalanced confidence in scientific rationality which does not correspond to the complexity of human nature.

Marx was a great lover of art, especially of literature. But it seems that he and more so many of his followers assume that only science can give knowledge in the strict sense. In his reflection on the continuing attraction of Greek art with all its mythology, Marx stated that the mythology disappears with the advance of science and its "real control" over the forces of nature. Ancient Greek art can only be appreciated as the charming product of the "historical childhood of humanity".<sup>219</sup> But here Marx fails to distinguish between objective, scientific knowledge and other forms of knowledge. Of course, in physics, biology, astronomy, etc., we cannot go back to mythology for explanations. But when it comes to the expression and communication of subjective experiences scientific rationality is rather helpless.

The East German author Franz Fuehmann has discussed this in an impressive way in a lecture at the East-Berlin Humboldt-University



about "The mythical element in literature".<sup>220</sup> He shows that basic human experiences of birth, life, love, fear, happiness, suffering, death find their adequate expression for the one who experiences them not through scientific explanations but through poems, narratives or other aesthetic forms. They make it possible to understand one's own experience by comparing it with that of others. Such experiences are experiences not only of the mind but of the whole natural and social being in its conscious and unconscious existence with all the senses. The scientific explanation of these experiences generalises and thus takes away their subjective character: medical textbooks don't explain or express what I feel at the birth of *my* child, or the death of *my* friend. For that I have to turn to the fictive image of a poem or to a narrative which evokes a similar experience. Fuehmann quotes Job: "O that my vexation were weighed and all my calamity laid in the balances! For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea".<sup>221</sup> From a scientific point of view this image is nonsense, but for those who suffer it may express the truth of their personal experience in a way which science cannot. Myths have this function, Fuehmann explains, and in that function they cannot be superseded by science. As scientific explanations they belong to the past, but as art they are immortal. They ask fundamental questions of life, for what is all this, why does this happen to me, for what do I live—questions which science cannot answer.

Fuehmann does not further comment on religion, but it is obvious that religions express themselves in the forms of art, in symbols, images, poems, songs, etc. As far as they ever claimed to give "scientific" explanations they are superseded by the sciences, but as far as they respond to the non-scientific but basic questions of human existence, as art does, their relevance and adequacy has to be tested on other grounds than that of scientific rationality.

The key problem between faith and atheism is not necessarily science. Science is concerned about causality. That is a crucial aspect of reality and its analysis has to be methodologically atheistic. Ancient kosmogomic myths, medieval christian theology and fundamentalistic believers till today may reflect on a divine power as the "first cause" and thus try to locate God in the framework of scientific explanations. Other believers will plead for a secular approach in scientific theory. Let science analyse reality as much and as far as it can on the basis of factors which can be observed and verified by its methods. And for me this includes the affirmation of historical materialism as a fruitful method of analysis and of dialectical materialism taken as its



methodological presupposition. Whether we in and beyond the realities which we thus can analyse scientifically are confronted with a divine call, with a fundamental orientation about the source and purpose of our life, is a question which science cannot decide. It is communicated to us in symbols, poems, myths, narratives, the truth of which has to be found out not through telescopes or microscopes, statistics or structural analysis.

Gardavsky has understood that the first chapters of Genesis in the Jewish-Christian Bible are not so much about the origin of the kosmos in terms of cause and effect, but about the future of human beings in history. He sets Marxist theory the task to explore and inherit whatever deep insights about human existence are hidden in religious traditions. However, he does this not in order to soften the Marxist stand on atheism, or to declare it a non-essential question. On the contrary, he sees atheism in a much deeper way than the usual atheistic propaganda as the "radical dimension of the Marxist world-view" "Marx' concept of total man and his understanding of communism are incomprehensible" without this essential dimension of atheism.<sup>222</sup>

This atheism is not the product of practical indifference—as that of people who have never bothered to ponder about the questions raised by faith in God. Neither is it the easy outcome of scientific rationality, as the atheism of the Enlightenment, which is unable to cope with the problems of human subjectivity. This atheism is the expression of the basic commitment of the Marxist communist to human emancipation in history through human efforts alone, without any illusionary hope and comfort.<sup>223</sup> The Marxist atheist, Gardavsky says, is the one who knows that human beings, weak and vulnerable as they are, are full of potential, but they have to depend on themselves only to realise this potential. To do so they have to give up all illusions, including the illusions about a transcendental God.

However, this should not happen by discarding *transcendence* as the usual atheistic propaganda does, but by integrating it into the perspective of human self-emancipation. Popular anti-clerical and anti-religious propaganda had once its historical and ideological necessity, but now socialist societies face the problem of "practical atheism", of the wide-spread attitude of total indifference to the deeper questions of life, of a lack of commitment to anything beyond one's own interests. Religion has disappeared from the life of such people, one way or the other, and with it cultural values. This has left a vacuum which easily gets filled by pseudo-cults of sport-fanaticism, etc. Gardavsky's concern is to avoid that the "vacuum without God"



becomes a “vacuum without spirit” or spirituality, leaving an uncontrollable, irrational empty space which can be occupied by all sorts of fetishes, producing new and worse forms of alienation. Marxist atheism has to fill the vacuum in order to prevent that.

How? Anti-theistic materialism or rationalism which deifie nature or reason are not the answer. What is needed is a human concept of transcendence which replaces the concept of divine transcendence. Gardavsky proposes that the atheism of marxism is the attempt to develop a theory of *human subjectivity* which transcends itself and he refers to the line of thinking on praxis which Marx started in the Theses on Feuerbach.

But what motivates the individual subject to share in the collective praxis of the struggle for a future communist society, knowing that he will be defeated by death? Why should he or she sacrifice his or her life for some far away future? The knowledge of the laws of history alone will not be enough. Gardavsky hesitates, like Che Guevara, to use the word which has been abused so much: love. He may think of Marx’ sweeping polemics against Kriege and other “true socialists” with their talk of love and faith in community, etc., ending up with the “old fantasy of religion” and “slavish self-abasement”.<sup>224</sup> But knowing what is at stake he overcomes such inhibitions and makes clear that what he speaks about is nothing sentimental or submissive. It is that which turns action, practice into the creativity of human self-realisation. It implies struggle, it does not exclude even the action of killing, but as the principle of creativity, of transcendence, of moving from “I” to “we”, it directs all action in going beyond present possibilities, in humanising the causalities of nature, in an over-all commitment to truly human relations. It makes that the hope, called communism, will not die in spite of our death. “That is why we don’t believe in God, though that is absurd.” With this sentence Gardavsky ends his book.

He himself declares that on this basis full co-operation with believers is possible in practice in spite of the difference in faith understanding. From the other side theologians of liberation argue that knowledge of God, biblically understood, exists indeed and happens only in the practice of love and doing of justice.<sup>225</sup> They reject as an idealistic approach the assumption that the essence of God could be known through philosophical reflection or contemplation, and not through and in *practice*. And it is in practice, Bonino says, that christians and Marxists can come together and — in Latin America — are coming together, sharing a common ethos of human solidarity which unites them in opposition to an inhuman organisation of society and in search



for justice as the immediate concrete demand of love, in spite of the radical difference in the horizon of faith and atheism.<sup>226</sup>

Are we alone with the task to build a more human society, left to ourselves in an indifferent universe and in a history overshadowed by death? Marxists and christians differ in the answer. Dogmatic statements cannot solve the problem. The only way is to declare it an open question. That is the way chosen by the Italian Communist Party which already in 1945 declared in its Constitution that any citizen may join the party "regardless of race, religious faith or philosophical convictions" as long as he accepts the political programme of the party.<sup>227</sup> Later Togliatti and other party leaders went further and recognised that the aspiration for a socialist society "can also find a stimulus in the religious conscience itself confronted with the dramatic problems of the contemporary world", and that religious consciousness could contribute to the development of the future classless society.<sup>228</sup>

Some marxists will take this in the way of Gardavsky's atheistic inheriting of the religious contribution, but others have come to the conclusion that atheism is not essential for marxism. The Socialist Unified Party of Catalonia/Spain which has a marxist tradition has discussed the question during its Fourth Congress in 1977. It deems it "now necessary to overcome the traditional identification of the Communist option with atheism". "Marxism was born connected with atheism as an expression of the ideological struggles of those times." But it is questionable whether atheism is a basic element of the Marxist method and a necessity in communist society. They expect atheist and christian and other communists to fight together, and add the significant remark that they should avoid the "attitude that these beliefs belong exclusively to the 'private sphere'".

*"On the contrary, encouragement should be given to overcome the privatisation of the religious and philosophical conscience of activists, through open debate among the different cultural currents present in the Party".<sup>229</sup>*

This is a crucial point in my opinion, in India as well as in societies where religion has been privatised and marginalised. Only in that way the vacuum of which Gardavsky spoke can be avoided. The common struggle has to be on the secular ground of marxist analysis and political program. One common world-view regarding the ultimate question cannot be imposed by a political movement without repeating the mistakes of all state religions. That seems to be the problem with Gramsci's radical immanentism of a total laicism in



which the Prince —the party — “takes place of the divinity or the categorical imperative.”<sup>230</sup>

The temptation to establish a new sort of Middle Ages with Marxism-Leninism-Maoism Thought, etc. as a kit for society, as an integrating religion, is particularly strong in societies which did not go through a secular, liberal, anti-clerical bourgeois epoch, as most of Europe and Latin America did. A truly secular movement has to accept a variety of world-views as the Italian communists have rightly recognised. But this should not lead to the privatisation of religion and philosophy, with all the dangers of vulgar pseudo-cults filling the empty public spaces. Marxist philosophy and critique of religion, materialism and humanism have a crucial role to play in equipping the revolutionary forces in the struggle against capitalism and for socialism.

In a country like India with its deeply rooted religious traditions and with the dangers of communal appeals and political games aiming at dividing the masses it is certainly not enough to present an atheistic-materialistic world-view as the final answer to all questions. What is needed is a critical interaction with the religious and cultural traditions in which on the one hand the reactionary and dehumanising elements are exposed and on the other hand insights, questions, values are discovered which should not be lost for the future. At present it tends to be the practice in mass-movements to keep quiet about religion. It is left to the individuals as a private affair. They may go to a temple-festival or pray with their backward relatives. But that will not do in the long run. As a christian I think that the role of the churches and its theological justifications has to be critically examined, while at the same time I am convinced that biblical narratives, themes and symbols can deeply enrich the struggle, both for christians who hear in them God's call and for atheists who interpret them within their frame of reference, as Bloch, Machovec, Gardavsky and many authors have done. Similarly Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and others should be encouraged to evaluate and share their heritage in the context of the common struggles. In that manner the open question may become a source of inspiration on the way to a communist society.

## NOTES

1. Marx/Engels/Lenin, *On Dialectical Materialism*, Moscow, 1977, 20 f.
2. *ibid.*, 17-19.
3. *Dialectics of Nature*, Moscow, 1976, 255.



4. Engels returns here to this example and the editors note that Hegel himself called it an absurdity to set a universal beside the particulars, see note 183, *ibid.*, 337.
5. *Grundlagen der marxistischen Philosophie*, Berlin, 1959, 131; quoted by A. Schmidt, *Concept of Nature*, *op. cit.*, 202.
6. See Schmidt, *ibid.*, 203.
7. *Coll. Works* 3, 305.
8. *German Ideology*, *Coll. Works* 5, 37.
9. *ibid.*, 31.
10. *Theses on Feuerbach*, *ibid.*, 6.
11. *Holy Family*, *op. cit.*, 24.
12. *German Ideology*, *op. cit.*, 39 f.
13. *ibid.*, 40.
14. *Critique of Gotha program*, *Sel. Works* 3, 13.
15. *Capital I*, 173.
16. Letter to F. Lasalle, 16.1.1861, *Sel. Correspondence*, 115.
17. *Sel. Works* 3, 162.
18. For this and a presentation of Social Darwinism and its far reaching influences, see Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, Verso/NLB, London, 1980, 86-102.
19. Marx in a note referring to Darwin, *Capital I*, 352.
20. Letter to Engels, 18.6.1862, *Sel. Corr.* 120; cf. Engels in a letter to F.A. Lange, *ibid.*, 161.
21. *Dialectics of Nature*, *op. cit.*, 307 f.
22. Letter to Lavrov, Nov. 1875, *Sel. Corr.*, 284.
23. *Dialectics of Nature*, 308.
24. Cf. Ch. 2, about Marx' concept to metabolism.
25. Cf. Schmidt, *op. cit.*, 83 ff.
26. Preface, *Anti-Duehring*, *op. cit.*, 9.
27. *ibid.*, 10.
28. See for this and the whole passage: Ted Benton, "Natural Science and Cultural Struggle: Engels on Philosophy and the Natural Sciences", In: *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, Vol. II *Materialism*, eds. J. Mepham and D.H. Ruben, Brighton, 1979.
29. *ibid.*, 110 f.
30. See Marx, "Herr Vogt"
31. See Benton, *op. cit.*, 113 ff.
32. *Dialectics of Nature*, 62.
33. *Anti-Duehring*, 55.
34. *ibid.*, 72.
35. See for example *Dialectics of Nature*, 251, on the various forms of motion.
36. *Capital I*, 715.
37. *Anti-Duehring*, 154.



38. *ibid.*, 31.
39. *Dialectics of Nature*, 231.
40. See for example, *Anti-Duehring*, 45 f.
41. *Sel. Works* 3, 346.
42. *Dialectics of Nature*, 39.
43. Marx/Engels/Lenin, *On Dialectical Materialism*, *op. cit.*, 353.
44. *ibid.*, 355.
45. *ibid.*, 359.
46. *ibid.*, 328.
47. *ibid.*, 335.
48. From Lenin, *Coll. Works* 38, 212; quoted in S. Chakraborty, "On the Problem of a Theory of Knowledge in Marx", *Social Scientist* 105, Feb. 1982, 46 f.
49. See Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, *op. cit.*, 57.
50. Marx/Engels/Lenin, *On Dialectical Materialism*, 361 f.
51. *ibid.*, 384 f.
52. Quoted by McLellan, *Marxism after Marx*, *op. cit.*, 108.
53. "On the significance of militant Materialism", in *Lenin Collected works* 33, 232 ff.
54. Thus observed by McLellan, *Marxism after Marx*, 127.
55. Cf. C. Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 3, Oxford 1978, 64 f.
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57. Reprint London, Merlin, 1971.
58. Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being*, 3, Labour, London, 1980.
59. *Prison Notebooks*, *op. cit.*, 407.
60. *ibid.*, 436.
61. *ibid.*, 437.
62. *ibid.*, 445 f.
63. *ibid.*, 456-7; 465.
64. *ibid.*, 465 f.
65. Regarding Gramsci's radical immanentism, see G. Dietrich's critical questions referred to in the section on "Atheism".
66. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I, Peking 1967, 295 f.
67. *ibid.*, 311 f.
68. *ibid.*, 312 f.
69. *Sel. Works II*, 143 f.
70. A. Schaff, *A Philosophy of Man*, London 1963, 100.
71. J.M. Lochman, *Das radikale Erbe*, Zuerich 1972, 58.
72. See "For Marx", London 1970.
73. See for example the studies of Poulantzas about the state.
74. *Theories of Surplus-value*, Part III, Moscow 1971, 275; quoted in: *Project Klassenanalyse*, Louis Althusser, Berlin 1975, 115.



75. *ibid.*, 276.
76. *Capital* III, 820.
77. Lenin, *Sel. Works* 1, 19.
78. *Sel. Works* 1, 13.
79. See I. Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, London Merlin 1970; Agnes Heller who lives meanwhile in western emigration has produced a number of studies on anthropological questions, like a "Theory of needs": "Instinct, Aggression, Character", etc. So far I have seen only an english translation of some of her articles in: *The Humanisation of Socialism. Writings of the Budapest school*, by A. Hegedus, A. Heller, M. Markus and M. Vajda, London, Allison 1976.
80. M. Markovic, *The Contemporary Marx*, *op. cit.*, is for example accessible in english.
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83. *ibid.*
84. *Coll. Works* 3, 275 f.; cf. G. Markus in an essay on the anthropology of the young Marx, published in A. Hegedus/M. Vajda, *Die Neue Linke in Ungarn Bd 2*, Berlin 1976, 45 f.
85. *Grundrisse*, 83 f.; cf. also *Capital* I, 571 on Bentham, quoted earlier.
86. *Sel. Works* 1, 14.
87. Cf. *Grundrisse*, 265.
88. See Wal Suchting, "Marx's Theses on Feuerbach", in: *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, 19 f.
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90. *Capital* I, 309 f.
91. *ibid.*
92. *ibid.*, 312.
93. *ibid.*, 316.
94. *ibid.*, 315.
95. Cf. *Capital* I, 336 f.
96. *Grundrisse*, 163.
97. *ibid.*, 156 f.
98. See for example the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.
99. *Grundrisse*, 158.
100. *ibid.*, 164.
101. *ibid.*, 162.
102. *ibid.*, 158.
103. *Coll. Works* 5, 51.
104. *Italics mine*, *Sel. Works* 3, 365 f.
105. *Coll. Works* 3, 299 f.
106. *ibid.*, 302.



107. Capital I, 174.
108. Coll. Works 3, 276 f.
109. Capital I, 252.
110. Capital III, 820.
111. See Art and Society. Essays in Marxist Aesthetics, London, Merlin 1979
112. *ibid.*, 25.
113. *ibid.*, 25.
114. *ibid.*, 32.
115. *ibid.*, 39.
116. *ibid.*, 50 f.
117. Anti-Duehring, 111.
118. "The Task of Youth Leagues", Coll. Works 31, 291.
119. Anti-Duehring, 111.
120. Coll. Works 3, 182.
121. Coll. Works 5, 466-468; cf. many other writings of this period.
122. Coll. Works 5, 49.
123. Sel. Works 1, 134 f.
124. This point has been made by H. Fleischer in talks on Socialist humanism and by Raymond L. Whitehead in his book "Love and Struggle in Mao's Thought", New York, 1977.
125. See Gabriele Dietrich, "The Unfinished Task of a Marxist Conceptualisation of the Women's Question", The Marxist Review, April 1983, and the thesis of Chhaya Datar, "Redefining Exploitation. Towards a Socialist Feminist Critique of Marxist Theory," I.S.R.E. Research Monograph, Bombay, 1982.
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127. *ibid.*, 43.
128. See R. McDonough and R. Harrison in: Feminism and Materialism. Women and Modes of Production, A. Kuhn and A.M. Wolpe (eds.), London 1978, 27 ff.
129. Chhaya Datar, *op. cit.* 12, quoted by Dietrich, *op. cit.*, 383.
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131. See Hilda Scott, Women and Socialism. Experiences from Eastern Europe, London, Alison, 1976.
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133. "The Changing Goals of Socialism in the Twentieth Century", Social Research, Spring 1980, 42.
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145. A. Th. V. Leeuwen, *Critique of Heaven*, London, 1972, 84.
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161. Capital I, 352.
162. Coll. Works 3, 306.
163. Letter to Bolte, 23.11.1871, Selected Corr., 254.
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167. *ibid.*, 84.
168. *ibid.*, 83.
169. Cf. Coll. Works 3, 212.
170. Quoted by Frostin, 190 f.
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172. 1839; Coll. Works 2, 7 ff.
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210. *ibid.*, 69.
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213. *ibid.*, 92.
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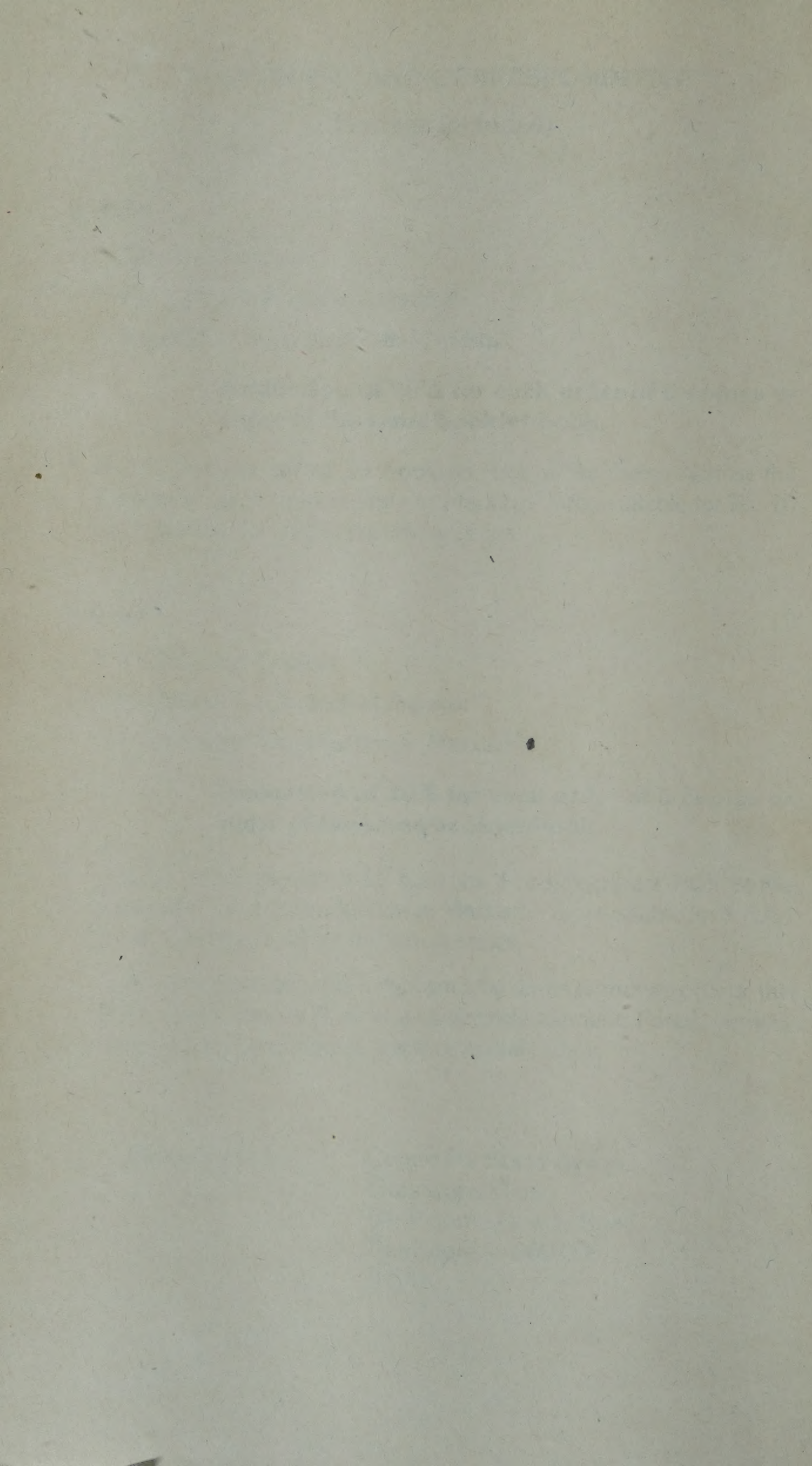
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